STREET AND SMITH'S

WESTERN STORY 10 CENTS

12c IN CANADA

VOL. 188 · No. 3 JANUARY 18th · 1941

GHOST OF THE YUMA KID

An Action-Packed Mystery Novel of the Cow Country by JAY LUCAS

Plus MANY OTHER STORIES BY YOUR FAVORITE AUTHORS

A SENSATIONAL OFFER!

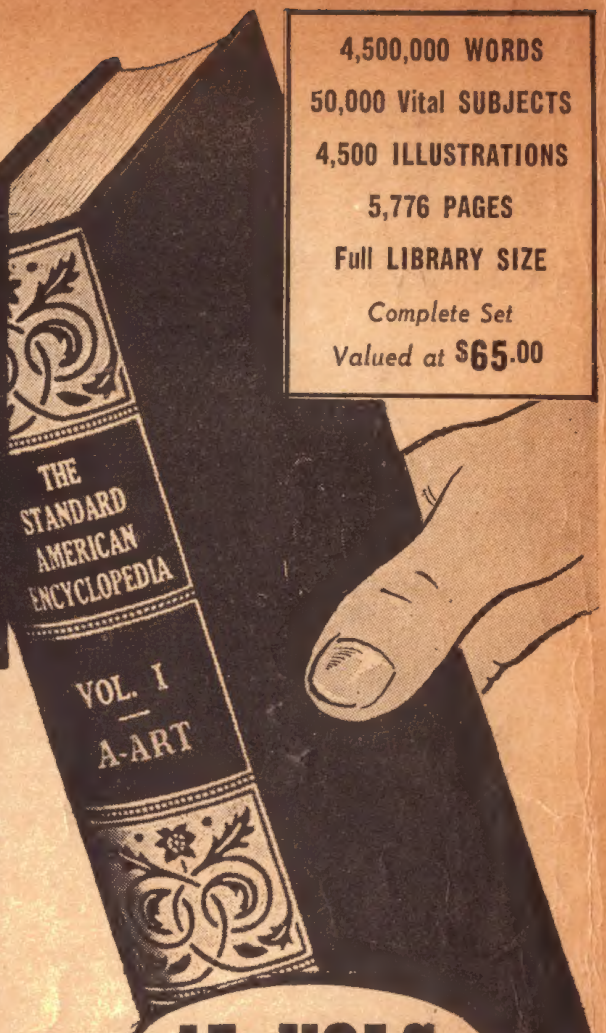
To READERS Of

WESTERN STORY

FREE

VOL. ONE Of The 15-VOLUME *Standard American* ENCYCLOPEDIA

NOMINAL MAILING CHARGE ONLY



4,500,000 WORDS
50,000 Vital SUBJECTS
4,500 ILLUSTRATIONS
5,776 PAGES
Full LIBRARY SIZE
Complete Set Valued at $65.00

FACTS ABOUT EVERYTHING UNDER THE SUN . . . At Your FINGERTIPS

As you thumb thru the STANDARD AMERICAN ENCYCLOPEDIA you will find page after page of fascinating, informative, essential facts brought to life in a vital dynamic manner . . . facts that will help you in your work and in your social life. History, Art, Literature, Science, Culture, Geography, Music, Religion, Government are all included. It's a liberal education for you . . . a lifetime of exciting reading for you and your family. It's a storehouse of knowledge for your children . . . a college education in itself. Once this great work was within the reach of only the wealthy because of the prohibitive cost. Today, thru the facilities of the National Committee for Education, you too may own these 15 massive, lavishly illustrated volumes. Now at last you and your family may have this mine of information and knowledge *practically as a gift!* You owe it to yourself, to your children and to your future to have these indispensable books close at hand at all times. Why, ONE fact alone may be the means of getting a better job, bigger pay . . a brighter future! Accept this generous offer TODAY!

EXTRA! For Those Who ACT NOW!

Beautiful, Lifetime, Deluxe Edition, bound in striking, Simulated Leather, yours for only a few cents more if you act promptly.

15 VOLS. *almost as a gift!*

SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

FREE ENCYCLOPEDIA GIFT COUPON

NATIONAL COMMITTEE For EDUCATION
147 West 22nd Street, New York City

Please send me FREE the First Volume of the Standard American Encyclopedia. I enclose 10c in stamps or coin to cover cost of mailing and handling. Reserve for me the remaining volumes and send complete details as to how to get them. (Remaining Volumes cost only 49c for the Regular Edition . . . or 69c for the Deluxe Edition - - - plus a few cents postage.)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

Check Binding ☐ REGULAR EDITION ☐ DELUXE EDITION

The 10c Mailing Charge for Vol. One is the Same for Either Edition.

HOW TO GET YOUR FREE BOOK!

Simply fill out the Privilege Voucher. Be sure to specify which edition you prefer. Then send this Voucher to the National Committee For Education, together with 10c in stamps or coin to cover cost of mailing and handling. Your First Volume will be sent to you absolutely FREE in a few days. When you receive it, examine it thoroughly. Then, and only then, decide whether you would like the remaining volumes of this magnificent reference work. They are YOURS, virtually as a gift. You pay only 49c for the Regular Edition (or 69c for the Deluxe Edition) . . . plus a few cents postage. And you may buy one volume a week, so that in a few short weeks your entire set will be completed. You pay only for the books you order and receive.

THIS EMPTY MEANS

IT takes brain to earn money—trained brain! The man without training is usually the man without cash. You can train your brain! Thousands of men have done it through spare-time study of I. C. S. Courses. Be a cash man—be a trained man—mail this coupon!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF SERVICE TO AMBITIOUS AMERICANS

1891 ★ 1941

BOX 4905-L, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Agriculture
- ☐ Air Brake
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Auto Engine Tune-up
- ☐ Auto Technician
- ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Bridge Engineering
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Chemistry
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Concrete Engineering
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Fire Bosses
- ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Fruit Growing
- ☐ Heating
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ House Planning
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Machinist
- ☐ Management of Inventions
- ☐ Mfg. of Pulp and Paper
- ☐ Marine Engines
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mine Foreman
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Patternmaking
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Poultry Farming
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Public Works Engineering
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ R. R. Section Foreman
- ☐ R. R. Signalmen's
- ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Sheet Metal Work
- ☐ Steam Electric
- ☐ Steam Engines
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Welding, Electric and Gas
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

BUSINESS COURSES

- ☐ Accounting
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ C. P. Accounting
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ French
- ☐ Grade School
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Illustrating
- ☐ Lettering Show Cards
- ☐ Managing Men at Work
- ☐ Railway Postal Clerk
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Sign Lettering
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Traffic Management

HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

- ☐ Advanced Dressmaking
- ☐ Foods and Cookery
- ☐ Home Dressmaking
- ☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing
- ☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering

Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England

WS—1C

STREET & SMITH'S

WESTERN STORY

TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

CONTENTS FOR JANUARY 18, 1941 VOL. CLXXXVIII NO. 3

The editorial contents of this magazine have not been published before, are protected by copyright and cannot be reprinted without the publisher's permission.

BOOK-LENGTH MYSTERY NOVEL OF RANGELAND DEATH

GHOST OF THE YUMA KID . . . . . **Jay Lucas** **9**

"Nothing's bad enough for the Yuma Kid; he's the most cold-blooded, unprincipled killer I ever had anything to do with. And he'll pay for his crimes!" vowed Steve Mallory. But how did this daring range detective expect to round up a phantom whose panther cry had already marked the doom of six men?

A SERIAL

TRAIL OF THE THUNDERING HERDS . . . **Bennett Foster** **101**

Fourth of Six Parts

"A man's got a kind of pride," Rusty Shotridge told the men who put a gun-backed quarantine between him and Dodge City. "This is a showdown. You can do one of two things: Either you can let my herd through or you can take to shootin'!"

SHORT STORIES

GUN-SWIFT RETRIBUTION . . . . . **L. P. Holmes** **49**

Both Jim Starling and Red Faraday wore quick-trigger guns that could be bought—but not for the kind of dry-gulching murder a treacherous range hog planned. . . .

DEPUTY'S DUTY . . . . . **S. Omar Barker** **61**

"Come with me an' you'll get a fair trial. Play it your way an' if the Polancos don't get you, the law still will, sooner or later," Deputy Spike Mallory told Patricio Cardenal. But what did Pat mean when he answered: "81-36-29-90?"

HEP AND THE DOG-FACED MAN . . . . **Glenn H. Wichman** . . . **72**

The cash customers of that cow-country carnival thought Bo-Bo, The Dog-Faced Man, looked an awful lot like Hep Gallegher—and Hep thought the customers looked an awful lot like a coming riot.

GUNSMOKE PURGE IN BIG PINE . . . . **Wayne D. Overholser** . . **83**

With a lynch-mad mob at his heels, what chance did Clark Newell have to buck the timber barons who were smashing the Big Pine country?

WESTERN STORY FEATURE

RANGE SAVVY . . . . . **H. Fredric Young** **71**

Cattle country facts and legends.

DEPARTMENTS

THE ROUNDUP . . . . . **The Editor** **5**
GUNS AND GUNNERS . . . . . **Phil Sharpe** **93**
MINES AND MINING . . . . . **John A. Thompson** . . . **95**
THE HOLLOW TREE . . . . . **Helen Rivers** **97**
WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE . **John North** **99**

COVER BY H. W. SCOTT

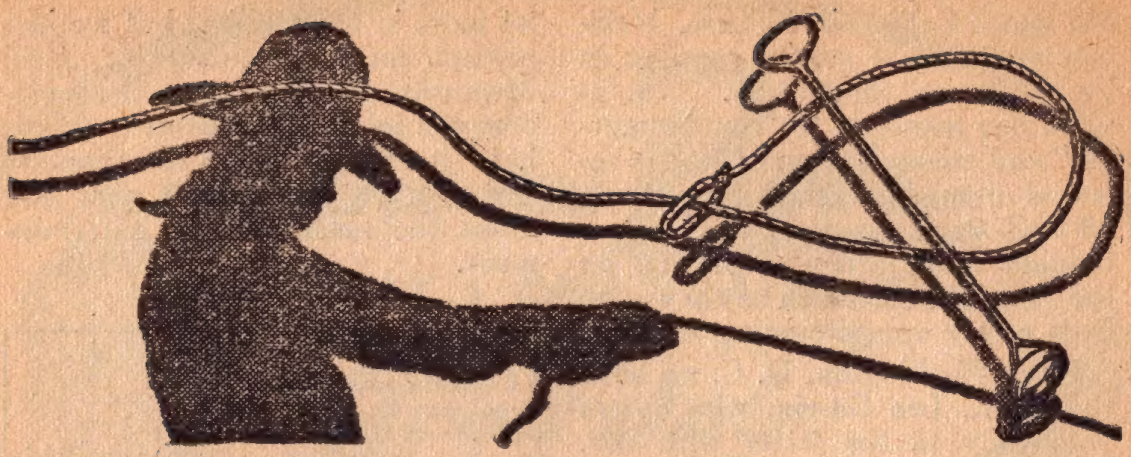
All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Publications, Incorporated, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Allen L. Grammer, President; Henry W. Ralston, Vice President; Gerald H. Smith, Treasurer and Secretary. Copyright, 1941, in U. S. A. and Great Britain by Street & Smith Publications, Inc. Reentered as Second-class Matter, May 15, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions to Canada and Countries in Pan American Union, $5.00 per year; elsewhere, $7.00 per year. We cannot accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. Any material submitted must include return postage.

10c per COPY
$2 Six Months
$4 per YEAR

Printed in the U. S. A.

STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC. • 79 7th AVE., NEW YORK



The Roundup

ONE of our readers, James M. Perry, takes exception to a couple of statements made in Range Savvy, and we have to admit he seems to be able to back up his criticism. Here's his letter:

"I beg to differ on two articles appearing in Range Savvy, October 26th. First, you say that the hair on the horse slopes from the head back toward the tail, while the hair on the cow slopes toward the head. You're right about the horse, but wrong about the cow. The truth is, both slope the same way. It is also true that both animals turn tail in a storm, and for the same reason—to protect the eyes, ears and nostrils.

"Second, you say that there are no robins in America, that the bird known here as the robin is only a thrush, and that the English bird is the only true robin. The truth is, both are robins simply because millions of people call them that. Both belong to the thrush family because of physical characteristics which compel scientists to so classify them.

"The bluebird is a thrush because of those physical characteristics. For the same reason the hummingbird is a woodpecker. When people observe a hummingbird hovering over a flower they usually conclude that he is after its nectar. But that's not so; he is after the small insects he finds there, and is spearing them with that sharp woodpecker tongue and beak of his. A friend of mine kept a young hummingbird in his office a short time. Thinking it lived on honey, he procured some and let a drop fall into its mouth. It nearly shook its head off getting rid of it. But when he dropped a fly into its mouth the hummingbird swallowed it and asked for more."

There's no doubt that Mr. Perry has just about put the robin, English and American, in its proper zoological place, but since we haven't yet had a chance to see how the hair on Ol' Bossy slopes, we're going to reserve our decision on that point. How about it, folks, have you anything to add to this interesting discussion?

Many of our readers will remember, no doubt, a letter from Mr. W. W. Suderly, of Port Jervis, New York, which we published in our December 7 Roundup. Mr. Suderly was of the opinion that there were

too many California Chinese, Mexican and animal stories running in the magazine these days. We invited our members to "come augurin' " and among the many letters received discussing the subject of these off-trail stories were two which we thought had particular bearing on the situation inasmuch as they were from pretty opposite points of view.

From Washington, D. C. we have Robert E. Lee Garcin, who agrees practically to the letter with Mr. Suderly. "I am a reader of Western Story for some time," writes Mr. Garcin, "and a subscriber for several years. Referring to the December 7th issue, I second the motion of W. W. Suderly one hundred percent. Western Story is slipping."

But, speaking from the other side of the corral, James E. Long, who hails from Los Angeles, has this to say:

"I just read your magazine of December 7th. I see that Mr. Suderly of Port Jervis says 'We are all quite tired of this kind of stuff.' Who does he mean *We?*

"I am just an old prospector and ranch man going back to winter in Arizona. Doesn't Mr. Suderly know that the horses are part of the Old West? If we'd not had horses how would we have farmed or mined? Horses are interesting to read about. But maybe Mr. Suderly never was west of Pittsburgh. Maybe he don't know about anything but gasoline trucks.

"I have bought magazines from Street & Smith ever since they published the Family Story Paper. I guess that would make it more than fifteen hundred copies. Let's have horse stories, mining stories—yes, and Chinese stories of California."

The foregoing letters sure go to prove how tastes differ! We've a lot more in our mailbag but we just haven't room for them this week. Meanwhile, we hope you other members will join in this parley and let's have it straight from the shoulder the type of yarns which you find make the most exciting entertainment.

Coming next week—

A smashing, suspense-filled novel by Ney N. Geer, featuring Potluck Jones and his red-headed, fire-eating pard, Too-bad Tommy O'Neil. This time the dauntless buckaroo detectives tangle with a crew of gun-swift, claim-jumping renegades in an adventure that is fraught with breath-taking peril. Get in on the spine-chilling showdown by reading TROUBLE SHOOTERS JACKPOT.

"When it comes to assaying cool nerve, these men start in where the rest of you leave off!" Sheriff Tom Ralls told the awed townsmen of Cascabel. And then he and the three strange saddlemates he had chosen to side him set out to keep a death tryst with the merciless Cottonwood killers. For a story packed with whirlwind action and gun fury, read FOUR HARD MEN OF CASCABEL, by Ray Nafziger.

Among the other stirring yarns in next week's big issue are COWMEN ARE BORN, by Jack Sterrett, SIX-GUNS FOR HIRE, by W. Ryerson Johnson, HERMIT OF THE YAGITAK, by Jim Kjelgaard, and many others. And don't miss the new installment of Bennett Foster's gripping serial of the great cattle drives, TRAIL OF THE THUNDERING HERDS.

Make me Prove

THAT I CAN TRAIN YOU AT HOME FOR A Good Job in Radio

I TRAINED THESE MEN

$10 TO $20 A WEEK IN SPARE TIME

I repaired some Radio sets when I was on my tenth lesson. I really don't see how you can give so much for such a small amount of money. I made $600 in a year and a half, and I have made an average of $10 to $20 a week—just spare time.

JOHN JERRY
1529 Arapahoe St.
Denver, Colorado

WORKS FOR STATE OF ILLINOIS

If I had not taken your Course I might still be doing odd jobs or digging ditches. I am working for the State of Illinois operating the 1,000 watt transmitter. If anyone wants to write me about your Course, I shall be glad to answer.

R. S. LEWIS
1901 S. Pasfield
Springfield, Ill.

$200 TO $300 A MONTH IN OWN BUSINESS

For the last two years I have been in business for myself making between $200 to $300 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N. R. I. to thank for my start in this field.

ARLIE J. FROEHNER
300 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas

THIS FREE BOOK
Has Helped Hundreds of Men Make More Money

Clip the coupon and mail it. I'm certain I can train you at home in your spare time to be a Radio Technician. I will send you a sample lesson free. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand. See how my course is planned to help you get a good job in Radio, a young growing field with a future. You needn't give up your present job or spend a lot of money to become a Radio Technician. I train you at home nights in your spare time.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

Radio Broadcasting stations employ Radio Technicians as operators, maintenance men, etc. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers and dealers employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices, are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

Many Make $5 to $10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, in addition to my regular Course, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets—start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make $5 to $10 a week in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. YOU ALSO GET A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make more money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio, Television Offer

Act today. Mail the coupon for Sample Lesson and my 64-page Book "Rich Rewards in Radio." They point out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tell about my Course in Radio and Television; show more than 100 letters from men I trained telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. Find out what Radio and Television offer you. MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute,
Dept. IAD
Washington, D. C.

GOOD FOR BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK SAMPLE LESSON **FREE**

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. IAD
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE without obligation, Sample Lesson and 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio" (No salesman will call. Write Plainly.)

Age.....

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....2FR

Omnibus of THRILLS!

Four book-length novels—four novelettes—by such famous detective-story authors as Cornell Woolrich, Steve Fisher, Cleve Adams and other top writers. . . .

Selected by—Frank Gruber—winner in the Mary Roberts Rinehart prize contest and author of the best sellers THE LAUGHING FOX and THE FRENCH KEY.

Plenty of swell illustrations—a fine, heavy-paper cover that will stay fresh on your library shelf—and no advertising at all in this 8½x11, 160-page thrill-omnibus.

The price of this four-star annual is as amazing as its action-packed contents—only twenty-five cents. Imagine . . . one hundred and fifty thousand thrilling, chilling words in one volume. Go to your dealer today and get your copy—it's the best value in ace detective fiction on the market. If your dealer can't supply you, fill out coupon below.

DETECTIVE Story Annual

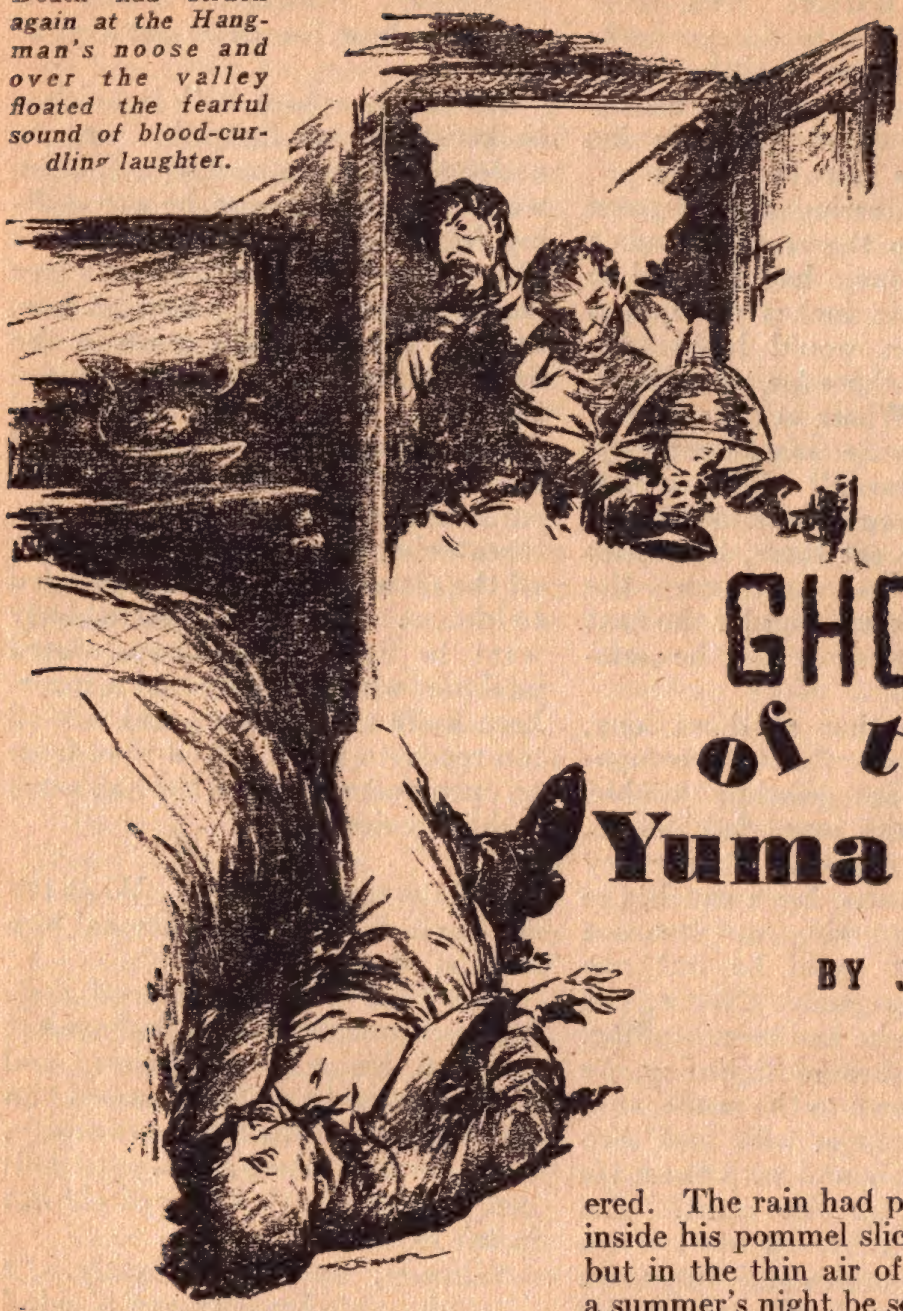
STREET & SMITH Publications, Inc.
79 Seventh Avenue, New York City

Inclosed is 25c. Please send me the DETECTIVE STORY ANNUAL.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....**State**.....



Death had struck again at the Hangman's noose and over the valley floated the fearful sound of blood-curdling laughter.

GHOST of the Yuma Kid

BY JAY LUCAS

CHAPTER I

THE HANGMAN'S NOOSE

It was a miserable night, dark as pitch, with the rain flying in cold sheets across the mesa, and the wind howling weirdly through the stunted cedars which bent before it. Steve Mallory was hard put to it to make his horse face the storm. Steve shivered. The rain had penetrated even inside his pommel slicker. Nowhere but in the thin air of Arizona could a summer's night be so cold. Should he, he wondered, give it up and seek shelter in the lee of a boulder until daylight? The mere thought of that made him feel even colder and damper than he was already.

But he was lost—no doubt about it. Nobody living could find his way through a strange country on a night like this. And then, to top it all, Conejo planted his feet suddenly and refused, in spite of quirt and spur,

to go an inch farther. Well, there was but one thing to do; go back, the rain behind him, until he found some rude shelter, and squat behind it until morning, wrapped in his slicker. A fine how-do-you-do!

A sudden, quivering glare of green lightning lit up the scene. And it showed why Conejo had stopped so stubbornly. Six inches more, and horse and man would have gone tumbling over the edge of a black, jagged bluff. Where in the name of a lop-eared cayuse was he anyway, Steve asked himself? Like as not, twenty miles from where he had set out to go. He sat there, the water running down his face, down the back of his neck, waiting for the next lightning flash to show him the country around.

It came; another of those long, shuddering green flares, accompanied by a distant growling rumble. Steve stared with awed fascination. Under him, in a gloomy little valley encircled by mesas, lay a ranch, the lightning shimmering on its wet roofs. And it could be but one ranch, the Hangman's Noose, the place for which he had been heading.

Between flashes of lightning, he found a trail down to the ranch, ably assisted by Conejo, who had seen the corrals below and with them his journey's end for the night. The little bay was hurrying now, storm or not. He stumbled and slipped on the dangerous trail, and once he fell to his chest; but presently he was trotting wearily across soft, deep sand. Steve tied him and crossed the little yard, his slicker flapping around him. He mounted the steps of the house, crossed the porch and knocked at the door, softly. It opened after a long wait, and a wiry young Mexican stood looking out at him with evil eyes. Gray eyes, rare in his race.

"Howdy," drawled Steve, "I reckon as how I must've got kind o' lost."

He had to repeat it in Spanish—broken, hesitant Spanish, hard to understand, and mixed with English words. As if ill at ease, he was shifting from one boot to the other, his blue eyes going to the Mexican's face and leaving it again. A devilish face, with a strange, bright glare to the eyes. Marijuana; Steve recognized the signs. A marijuana addict mad at the moment from a large dose of the deadly drug. The man began to curse him in a high, hysterical voice, threatening him, ordering him to get off the place. Steve was half-inclined to do so. He didn't particularly want to fight a marihuana-crazed madman who probably had a razor-keen knife up his sleeve and was all too ready to use it. And then from an open doorway down the hall came a sharp voice:

LET the man in, Diego! What the devil do you mean, keepin' him standin' in the rain?"

This time Diego understood English well enough. He backed against the wall, his gray eyes glaring and darting balefully as Steve passed him and strode into the lighted doorway. Then, as if abashed, he stopped suddenly, fumbling his battered old hat in his hands.

"Howdy," he said hesitantly. "I . . . uh . . . I'm only sort o' ridin' chuck line. I mean, I was a-lookin' for a rough-string job, but this time o' year, with the work slacklike—" He stood on one foot and then the other, water forming little pools under each. Never had a backwoods cowpuncher seemed more green and apparently overwhelmed at finding himself not in a bunkhouse but in a well-furnished, almost luxurious room.

"Come in, pardner. Set down." One of the two men by the fire stood up hospitably to greet Steve. He was a middle-aged man, quite big-boned, with great hands and feet and a huge, heavy jaw. He looked so hopelessly clumsy, there seemed to be something unnatural about him. And to ruin any chances he might have had for reasonably good looks, he wore a great, drooping mustache that almost hid the lower part of his face. But he seemed to emanate kindliness, friendliness.

"Believe I will. Thanks," said Steve. Pulling off his slicker, he hung it and his old hat on a nail in the hall. And then he stood staring at the deep, wet mud he had left on the clean floor.

The big-boned man spoke quickly. "Heck, that's nothing. Diego, git a mop an' wipe it up. An' put the stranger's horse in the barn."

Turning, Steve chanced to see Diego in the doorway. The Mexican's wild eyes were glaring at all three of them alike. And suddenly he whirled, went down the hall with quick, catlike steps. The bony man shook hands with Steve, whose palm was almost lost in the other's.

"Diego—he's drunk again," the big man said apologetically. "Blamed if I know where he gets the licker!"

Steve said nothing. He thought anybody around here should know the signs of a marijuana addict.

"I'm Sam Weaver, an' this is my pardner in the outfit, Jerry Endicott," Steve's host announced. The little gray-haired man across the fire looked up and nodded dully.

"Oh!" said Steve, sudden light breaking on his face. "Then I reckon as how this here is the Hangman's Noose outfit, as uster belong to the Yuma Kid, that there feller as done all them killin's."

Weaver nodded curtly. Sizing Steve up, he saw a tall, very wiry young fellow with blue eyes and brown hair and a face that, if it had not been for its expression of loutish ignorance, would have been keen, even handsome. "Rough-string man?" Weaver mused. "Well, you look like you could stick 'em. I think we can use you, friend. Had chuck?"

Steve nervously eyed Diego, who was mopping the floor in the doorway, meanwhile shooting evil glances his way.

"Uh-huh. Et at a nester's." At a motion from Weaver, he had got close to the fire and had seated himself, out on the edge of a chair, where he sat very straight, his boot toes meeting under him and his heels apart. Even Jerry Endicott, of the pained, dull face, managed to throw a faint, woeful smile to his partner when Steve was looking toward the Mexican. And then Diego, mop in hand, hurried back to the kitchen, muttering to himself.

A NEW voice came in the room where there were only the three men, a pleasant drawl, quite self-possessed.

"Mr. Weaver, I'm the detective you sent for—the Bryan man."

"Huh!" His eyes opening wide, Weaver seemed to leap a foot from his chair, and his great, misshapen jaw fell. He stared in unbelief at the lean, wiry young man lounged comfortably in the chair opposite him, grinning slightly at his discomfiture.

"Didn't want Diego to know who I am. The fewer people who know the better," added Steve, the corners of his eyes crinkled up.

"Well, you sure fooled me! Why, I thought you were a cowboy!"

"I am," Steve told him. "I've

only been with Bryan less than a year. What good would it do for him to send you a man that wasn't a cowboy?"

"That's right!" said Weaver, and again, "That's right!" and he leaned back in his chair and began to laugh, seeing the joke on himself. He was an odd-looking man, part of the oddness coming from his having very light-blue eyes and coal-black hair and mustache—and that great, heavy jaw under the mustache.

"Let's get down to business," suggested Steve. "I don't know yet whether I want to stay here openly or not, or camp out somewhere awhile looking things over. Your trouble is rustling, isn't it—bad rustling?"

"Bad is right!" said Weaver. "It's about to break up the outfit. And killing. Five men missing in a year, and we couldn't find a single body." He jerked his heavy face up. "We spend more time lookin' for bodies than we do for long ears!"

"Five men! Your letter said four."

"Two days ago our foreman disappeared somewhere over near Devil's Canyon. His horse came back. . . . No, it wasn't a fall; the saddle or horse weren't skinned up, and Ben's carbine was still in its scabbard. We've had every man on the place, and a lot from outfits around, huntin' for him—but no use."

"Did you send for a good Navaho tracker, to back-track his horse?" asked Steve.

The big jaw fell in consternation. "Huh! We . . . we never thought o' that! I'll do it pronto . . . No, I suppose it's too late now, after the rain."

"Any rustling from other outfits around?" Steve queried.

"Uh-huh. The Rafter Bar is jest about broke now. They'll have to close out any day; they have hardly any cattle left. Mighty fine people, too, the Edwardses; I think a heap of 'em. They have a little outfit over in Skeleton Valley."

Steve grinned wryly. "Somebody sure picked pleasant names for places around here! Skeleton Valley and the Hangman's Noose!"

Weaver chuckled. "The Yuma Kid thought up that last brand, o' course; he was that kind. She does sound sort o' murderous. Me an' Jerry's thinkin' o' recordin' another an' changin' over. One don't sound so plumb evillike."

His partner looked up and spoke for the first time, his face drawn in a wry smile:

"We won't have to bother now; we're about broke."

Sam Weaver turned to him considerately. "How's your headache, Jerry?"

So that was the trouble with Jerry Endicott—a bad headache. Steve felt sorry for the little old man; a glance showed him to be a kindly, old-fashioned cattleman of the best and squarest type. Endicott muttered something about his head feeling better, but he did not look it.

"I read your letter," Steve told Weaver, "and I've been making some inquiries, sort of casual, on my way in here. The thing is queer—mighty darn queer! I was told that every time there was a person missing, or even a big rustling done from the outfit, you've heard somebody go tearing past here on a fast horse at night, yelling like a panther. But," he added apologetically, "I suppose that's another of those wild stories that get around."

WEAVER shook his big head, and tugged uneasily at one side of his bushy mustache.

"It ain't! An' I suppose they told that that was the Yuma Kid's yell.

He used to do just that after he'd killed somebody, or lifted a herd. It was his way o' crowin' an' braggin'."

"From what I heard," remarked Steve, "the Yuma Kid must have been partly crazy, at least. Something wrong in his head."

Weaver thought that over a long time, thinking slowly as always. At last he looked up.

"No. He was crazy like a fox. He come in here without a nickel an' he built up this big outfit in no time —three, four years—from neighbor's cattle, an' mebbe other things he done. Some stick-ups was blamed on him, like that of the bank in Winton. But nobody ever was able to prove a thing on him, an' he'd walk up to the sheriff an' start jokin' with him every time he met him. Does that sound as though he was crazy?"

"Well, there's nobody as clever as a crazy man, in some ways," Steve pointed out. "But if he'd had good sense he'd have stopped; he'd have known that the best of 'em slip sooner or later. He did, with that Nason killing. He'd have been hanged for that if he hadn't broke jail the day before he was to be executed. They say he's the only man ever got out of the death cell in Florence."

"Can't have been so crazy to do that," ruminated Weaver, scratching his head.

"See here," continued Steve, "I understand he drowned in Skeleton Creek. Is that true?"

Jerry Endicott looked up. "He shore did. I seen it all myself. I was over there ridin' that day, lookin' after the cattle, an' I seen a young feller ridin' up to me. When he got close, who was it but the Yuma Kid himself. He'd got a good horse an' saddle an' clothes somewhere, an' two guns—somebody must have helped him. But he didn't have no tobacco an' he asked me for some. Well, what would a feller like me do? I give him all mine I had with me, an' my papers, too, an' matches. An' jest as we was ridin' along, talkin', here comes the posse sweepin' out of a draw not two hundred yards off; they'd spotted him with glasses off a hill an' stole up that close. He took one look at 'em, and he let out that panther yell of his an' headed straight for Skeleton Creek, jest above the break, an' into the water as fast as he could go."

"It was pretty high water?" asked Steve.

"High! Biggest flood in years; cedars a-washin' an' a-tumblin' down, an' the water roarin' somethin' powerful. Well, where the Yuma Kid tried to cross, just above the break in the rim, he didn't have the chance of a snowball in hell; a cork couldn't have gone through that break without bein' all smashed up. An' there was blood runnin' down his back in two places, where two bullets from the posse had caught him square. Reckon he knew he was dyin' anyhow, an' didn't want 'em to have the satisfaction of takin' him. He was pretty wild, the Yuma Kid was."

"So he drowned?"

ENDICOTT nodded. "A big snag caught him an' swept him off his horse. He hung onto the end of a limb a while, washin' down—the water was b'ilin' around him, all red an' greasy-lookin' an' tumblin'. I was close enough to hear what he shouted. He had only his head out of the water, an' his hat was gone. He let out that wild panther yell again, an' shouts: 'Tell the sheriff an' the posse to go to Hades; where I'm goin' right now!' An' then the end of the limb broke, an' he was

sucked down, right into the break in the rim, under water."

Steve sat there for a moment without speaking. It was a gruesome story, a bad end to a bad life.

"Could he swim?" he asked finally.

"Nary a stroke; I'd knowed him for years. An' even if he could, it wouldn't do him no good there. You'd better ride over an' see the place. The water will be up again after all this rain."

"How," asked Steve, "did you an' Mr. Weaver come to get his place here?"

"I'd bought it from the Kid while he was in jail, waitin' trial. I was back home in Texas, but we fixed it by mail an' I come right out. It was a pretty big outfit, an' I found I couldn't swing it alone, an' meet the interest on the notes. I put an ad in the *Stockmen's Journal*, an' that's how I got in touch with Sam here. He was livin' in Montana but he come down, an' we made a partnership deal."

Montana, thought Steve. So that was why Weaver hadn't been able to recognize the plain signs of marijuana on the Mexican; the stuff was unknown up there. This was certainly a queer business. The Yuma Kid dead, and just exactly the same kind of murdering and rustling going on. And, strangest of all, that panther yell being heard in the night, the Yuma Kid's cry of exultation at one of his coups. Steve had had some preconceived notions about this matter. Were they all wrong? Thinking now, looking into the fire, it began to come to him that there was something wrong with Jerry Endicott's story. He could not say just what. Was it that Endicott seemed a little too anxious to make it sound true, to be believed? If ever there was an honest, kindly little man, Jerry Endicott seemed to be that man. Certainly he was no crook, and if he had, as he said, been living in Texas, he could not have been mixed up in the Yuma Kid's criminal career. Steve decided to test him. He jerked his face around suddenly and pointed a finger.

"Mr. Endicott," he said grimly, "the Yuma Kid isn't dead, and you know it!"

The change that came over the little man was almost pitiful. He staggered weakly to his feet, then sank back into his chair again. His withered face was ash-gray and his bleached eyes dilated.

"He's dead! He is dead, I tell you! I—"

Weaver sat straight up in his chair, his big jaw sticking out. "He'd better be dead!" he declared grimly. "If he ain't, we're sunk. He'd want to get his outfit here back, and he'd kill all of us. He'd kill us, I tell you! Murder us!"

"That's it! That's it!" Little Jerry passed a hand blindly across his forehead. "He has to be dead, or we're sunk!" He raised trembling hands to his head.

Weaver got up and crossed the room. He put a huge, clumsy hand on his little partner's shoulder.

"Dang it, Jerry," he said concernedly. "I forgot about your headache. We shouldn't have bothered you till mornin' with this thing! Why don't you go to bed and get some rest."

"I'd better, I reckon." Jerry rose and walked toward the door, his feet dragging. "I'll take a couple of aspirins." Passing Steve Mallory, he stopped and held out his hand. "Good night, son. See you in the morning."

Steve took the hand. Warm, friendly, with a firm pressure, it seemed the hand of an honest man. But in the eyes that met Steve's for

a moment there was a terrible pain that seemed more than physical, more than mere headache. And there seemed to be something else in Jerry Endicott's bleached eyes. Was it pleading? Was he mutely begging Steve to do something?

CHAPTER II

THE PANTHER CRY

AFTER Endicott had left the room there was a long silence, both men staring gloomily into the fire.

"What do you think of it?" asked Weaver, a worried crease across his forehead.

"Did Endicott," asked Steve slowly, "want you to send for me?"

There was reluctance in Weaver's answer. "Why . . . no, he didn't. We argued about it a lot, but he held that a detective would do no good here an' might do harm. In fact he didn't know I sent for you till today, an' I told him I was expectin' you. First time I ever went against Jerry in anything. He sure knows cattle—an' he's the finest little feller ever lived."

Steve nodded and answered the question Weaver had asked a few moments before.

"What do I think? I don't know. There are only two possible answers. One is that the Yuma Kid's still alive; the other, that somebody's trying to imitate his tricks, to put the blame on a dead man and keep it off himself. What's your opinion?"

"I dunno . . . I dunno." Weaver looked blank and puzzled, and a little scared. It was just how Steve had expected him to look; he had little respect for the Montanan's brains.

They sat there silent again, and presently Steve asked: "Have you a picture of the Yuma Kid around anywhere?"

Weaver dug an old album from under some newspapers on a table and thumbed clumsily through it.

"There he is. Course I never seen him, but Jerry tells me it's a good likeness."

Steve studied the snapshot. It showed a young man of medium height. He was of rather slight build but with good shoulders and a graceful figure. In spite of a small, weak chin, he was strikingly handsome. And he certainly looked like anything but the cold-blooded murderer he had proven himself.

"Reared a cowboy," remarked Steve. "Never did anything but ride."

"Huh! How can you tell that?"

"The small hands and feet. And he seemed to be proud of them; he stuck them out well where they'd show." A hard-bitten Arizona cattleman, Steve knew, generally looked first at a man's hands and feet when hiring him. If his hands were soft and small enough, his boots trim enough, he got the job, because he'd been reared in the saddle, so to speak. Queer that Weaver didn't know that. But the big rancher was looking, with a rueful grin, at his own great, bony paws.

"What business," he asked, "was I raised in?"

Steve laughed and shook his head; that was too deep for him. Weaver stuck out a foot in one of the largest boots Steve had ever seen.

"Well, between the two of us, it was sheep. Runnin' over the coulees up North don't shrink a man's feet none, nor herdin' them blattin' woolies. But I always wanted to be in cattle, an' when I saw Jerry's ad, lookin' for a partner— Well," he ended philosophically, "when we go broke here, which'll be soon, I'm get-

Steve tried desperately to break the girl's grip for they were spinning madly toward the roaring break from which no living thing had ever returned!

tin' back into the game I know. There's good money in sheep when a man knows the game. An' "—his grin turned wry—"an' no panther yowlin' at night to scare a man out o' a year's growth."

THEY talked perhaps a half hour more, talk of little consequence, until Sam Weaver, yawning, suggested that they go to bed. He looked very sleepy. A big, clumsy, stupid man of that kind would sleep like a log no matter what happened on the ranch, especially a man like Weaver, who had probably never in his life done anything that would hurt the tenderest conscience—just spent his life walking the hills after a band of sheep, not even troubling to think. The rancher led the way down the corridor and showed Steve a room opposite his own. In the doorway, Steve turned, his face sober.

"Mr. Weaver, I'm going to ask you to do something, and I hope you'll do it."

"Huh?"

"Lock your door tonight. And push a chair against it, with the back under the knob. And see that your window is fastened well. I have a hunch that my being here may precipitate trouble."

"Huh! But what could happen?"

"Plenty! Will you do what I ask?"

"Why . . . er . . . sure. But danged if I can see—"

"Well, it never hurts to take precautions," Steve pointed out. "Good night."

He stopped, listening, until he heard the key turn in the lock opposite, and the awkward rattle of a chair back being pushed into place. Then, fastening his own door in the same way, and seeing to the window, Steve went to bed. He had a feeling very unsual to him, a feeling of fear; there was something evil in the atmosphere of this place in the black little valley between the black rims of the mesas. Nor was it merely hunch or notion. He reasoned that whoever was guilty of the crimes that had been committed around here was very cunning, perhaps with the cunning of a half-mad man. If this man found out that a detective was here—as he probably had found out already—anything might happen tonight. A strange affair, Steve mused. And if he got to the bottom of it, there would undoubtedly be a simple and logical explanation of it all; there always was. With that thought, Steve, tired from his ride in the storm, fell asleep.

Barely asleep; no more. For suddenly he found himself sitting up in the bed in the dark, his hair almost standing on end and his jaw dropped. A wild, unearthly scream was ringing around the house, rising and falling, with an eerie sharpness. It stopped, only to rise again, and a third time, dying off at the last as though sweeping down the little valley. It sounded like the scream of a woman terrified out of her senses or like the wail of some lost soul.

And then to Steve, in his startled, half-awake state, came the answer. He grinned wryly at his own fear.

"Panther!" he muttered, and started to lie down disgustedly. A panther trying to get at a calf in the corral. Well, let some of the cowboys in the bunkhouse fire a shot or two and scare it off.

And then, fully awake at last, Steve lit on both feet almost in the middle of the floor. With shaking hand, he jerked down the window shade, hastily lit the lamp. The panther cry! The deadly yell of exultation said to be given by the Yuma Kid. Or by the Yuma Kid's ghost! Surely no mortal lips could frame

such a ghastly imitation of that blood-curdling wail which late riders sometimes heard echoing through the most lonesome canyons!

Steve hastily got his trousers on and shoved his bare feet into his boots. Tossing the chair aside, he flung his door open, and dashed out. Sam Weaver was just bursting through his own door, in the underwear in which he had evidently slept. The man was barefooted, his great bony feet trembling under him.

"It's *him!* It's *him!*" he babbled. "We . . . we heard it the night Ben, the foreman, was killed!"

Steve felt a sense of relief at seeing him. He had been afraid that the panther cry marked the end of Weaver. He looked quickly up and down the hall.

"Endicott!" he grunted hastily. "Which is his room?"

"Huh? That one."

Steve ran to the door he indicated and flung it open. He had already noticed a streak of light under it. And in the doorway he stopped. He felt Weaver press up beside him and stop, too, and then the man's voice came.

"Holy Jumpin' Jehoshaphat! He . . . he's *dead!*"

THEY stared down at the contorted figure on the worn carpet. It was a horrible sight, the limbs twisted to unnatural angles, the lips drawn back, the face blue, and the eyes staring with a frightful horror left stamped in them forever.

Weaver went over to the body, his face lined with grief. He looked at what was left of Jerry Endicott and then turned to Steve, throwing his hands out. "But there ain't no blood! There ain't no blood!"

"Cyanide—poisoned," said Steve shortly. He was examining the body, but with little interest; it had little to tell him.

"Poison! You mean somebody poisoned Jerry!"

A swift glance showed Steve that there was no bottle in sight, no water even. "Let's go to the kitchen," he said, and Weaver followed him back shakily.

There, by the light of the kerosene lamp in his hand, Steve saw a small bottle on the drain board of the sink, and beside it a water glass half full.

"It's the aspirin he said he'd take," said Weaver dully.

Steve picked up the bottle, glanced at the label, at the red skull and cross bones, and showed it silently to Weaver. "Potassium Cyanide" was marked on it plainly, in large letters.

"What was that stuff doing here?" Steve demanded.

"Why . . . why, Jerry got it last week, to poison coyotes. It was settin' on that shelf."

"Where?"

"Right here. I remember seein' it today."

"And here's the aspirin on the second shelf above it. Why don't people learn to keep poisons away from safe medicines?"

"I kind o' thought o' that today when I saw it. I was goin' to say somethin' to Diego, or Jerry. If . . . if I had, poor little Jerry wouldn't be—" Weaver turned away quickly to hide his emotion.

They went back to where the body lay and Steve made further inspection of it and of the room. To no purpose. Jerry Endicott had not been in bed; he had not begun to undress. Probably he was feeling ill before he even got back here from the kitchen, for cyanide works with deadly swiftness. He had barely got his door closed, and collapsed, to die

alone, in the fiendish torture that had left such ghastly marks on his twisted body and blue face. Weaver seemed to be trying to keep his eyes away from the body, but could not. He was shaking like a leaf and his heavy face was white. Steve looked at him.

"Got any whiskey in the house?" he asked.

"Ye-yes. I keep it locked in a drawer in my room. Diego—I don't know where he gets the stuff." Suddenly Weaver stared at the door. "Diego! Why didn't all our racket wake him up? Maybe he's—"

"I don't think he's dead," Steve interrupted quietly. He followed Weaver and only shrugged when the rancher burst open the door of the room next to the kitchen, to find the place empty. Steve made a swift search of the room. All he found of interest was a few dried leaves carefully stored in a tin box.

"Know what this is?" he asked Weaver.

"N-no."

"It's marijuana," Steve explained grimly. "Now, where's that whiskey?" And when Weaver had gone to his own room and pulled a long bottle out, he waved it aside. "No, you take a good stiff drink. It'll brace you up, and you sure need it."

"I . . . I don't want to git drunk," Weaver protested, with poor little Jerry—" He shuddered and left the sentence unfinished.

"You won't, the shape you're in. There, that's enough for this time. Let's go to the living room."

THEY did so and presently the color began to come back to Weaver's face, and some of his composure returned. Steve had picked up the album again and was studying the snapshot of the young man beside the horse's head.

"Diego isn't all Mexican, is he?" he asked. "He has gray eyes."

"I don't know much about him," Weaver admitted. "I don't speak much Spanish, only a little I picked up since I came down here. Jerry said Diego told him his father was a white man, but he died when Diego was only a year old. His mother had to go back to living with her folks, an' the kid never learned much English."

"Know anything about his father, about who he was?"

"He said he was—let me see now—an uncle or something to the Yuma Kid."

"I see . . . I see; that would explain the resemblance. What color hair had the Kid, do you know?"

"Sort o' light, I think. Seems to me I heard Jerry say it was what you'd call blond."

"That would be easy to fix," Steve muttered to himself. "But most Mexicans have very small hands and feet."

"What would be easy fixed?"

"Oh, nothing. Still, there's something— No; I haven't got to the bottom of it yet; it's a mighty queer mix-up. Why should Jerry Endicott help—"

"Huh? Help what?"

"Oh, nothing," Steve repeated, putting the album aside after a last scrutinizing glance. He shook his head, and sighed. Part of the thing was plain: Endicott had, somehow, been mixed up with the Yuma Kid, had probably been trying to shield him for some strange reasons. His meeting with him on the day of the alleged drowning had been no chance; he was helping him escape. Why? This second Yuma Kid, or the Yuma Kid's ghost, or whatever it was, had almost ruined Endicott's outfit. Weaver's words broke in on his meditations.

"Poor little Jerry! To think that he'd take poison by mistake for aspirin!"

"He didn't," said Steve shortly.

"Huh! You mean—suicide?"

"No."

"Huh!"

"Murder."

"But—" Then, as if beyond speech, Weaver threw out his big hands. The bottle of whiskey was on the table and Steve passed it to him. The rancher drank deeply, paused, drank again. "What makes you think that?"

"Diego apparently isn't a very good housekeeper; there was dust on those shelves. I could just make out the print of the bottles. They'd been switched. Endicott would only strike a match to take a glance; he knew the kitchen well enough to find the glass and water in the dark. At least some moving around had been done to those bottles; I couldn't be sure what."

In spite of all the liquor he had drunk, Weaver was white and shaking again; there was dread in his eyes. "W-what are we going to do? Hadn't I better call the boys?"

Steve Mallory held up his hand to stop him, while he considered.

"Better let it go as an accident. If whoever did it thinks he's escaped suspicion, I might get at him easier, catch him off guard. I think I'll clear out for three or four days, and not have it known I was here when the murder was committed. When I come back, don't let on you recognize me; I may just hit you up for a job as if I'd never seen you. I think I'll go over and blow in at the Rafter Bar as if by accident. How do I get there?"

"Why-y-y—I wouldn't do that if I were you." There was a strange look in the eyes Weaver turned on him.

"Why not?" demanded Steve.

"Well, old Edwards is sort of—funny. He don't like strangers around."

"I'll look it over anyhow," Steve declared. "You said the ranch was only two or three miles above where the Yuma Kid was drowned, didn't you? I'd like to see that, too."

"That's right; you should see that," agreed Weaver. He gave Steve directions and told him also of a cabin halfway between the two places, owned by the Hangman's Noose, where Steve would find blankets and food. There was no one staying there at the time, and it would be a good place to hide out until he wanted to come back here. From it, he could ride the range on both sides.

Steve went to the barn and saddled Conejo. In a few moments he was bucking the storm again on the reluctant horse. He went back up the same trail to the mesa, and at its top stopped and turned to sit looking back. He could see lights springing up in the bunkhouse; Weaver had given the alarm and the cowboys were dressing hurriedly. Steve was about to turn away when the wind died down for a moment.

And then, on what was left of the wind, a wild sound came up to him from the gloomy little valley; it seemed to come almost directly from the houses down there. A wild, eerie scream, wailing, dying, rising, falling, until at last the mounting gust of wind swept it away. The panther cry again! Steve's lips tightened.

"That's meant for me!" he muttered. He reined his horse around. "Uh-huh—meant for me, to scare me."

But he was not scared; he was less so than he had been, if possible. It struck him that this last cry was overdoing the thing. To Steve, it

meant that the man behind all this mystery was not quite as clever as he had thought at first. Oh, yes—clever enough! But he could be caught. And so thinking, the sheets of rain beating against his slickered back, Steve rode on in the darkness.

CHAPTER III

SKELETON CREEK

HE found the line cabin easily enough. He cooked and ate a meal there, and fed his horse some oats he found. And then he appropriated a couple of blankets from the single bunk, tied them behind his saddle, and rode on. He was not going to sleep in any isolated cabin, or any other place where he might be found easily.

Three or four miles away, Steve found what he was looking for, a deep cave in a bluff. It was powder dry, and large enough to give him and Conejo plenty of room. He spread the blankets and slept, and when morning came he woke up to see the sun shining brilliantly in on him, to smell the air fresh and cleared after the storm. He had brought a little food and oats from the cabin so he and Conejo fared pretty well for breakfast. Now, to find the Rafter Bar, and that break where Skeleton Creek went through the rim.

In daylight it was easy enough to discover the latter; the dull roar could be heard miles off on the still air. Steve came to the rim and followed it, level with the mesas around, until it narrowed to a mere wall on the top of which he rode. And then he was stopped by a break, a crack hardly twenty yards wide, in that wall. Dismounting, he felt the rock tremble and shiver under his feet. From below came that awful roar of surging, struggling water, but so far down, it looked deceptively harmless and smooth.

Steve stood inspecting the country around. Far below in the immense valley lay Clarendon, the bustling mining town through which he had passed on his way to the Hangman's Noose. To his left lay what he recognized from Weaver's description as Skeleton Valley. It looked like a barren, miserable place, mostly white sand—so barren that in places the sand had even drifted into little dunes. He judged the width of the place to be at least three miles. Its length he could not tell, for about four miles up it curved around a mountainside out of sight. And about half way to that curve, close to the creek, he saw what must be the Edwards outfit, the Rafter Bar. What a place for a cow ranch, in that desolation! The presence of running water all the year around could be the only reason for its existence.

Steve had to make a wide circle back to find a spot where he could slide his horse down at a dizzy angle, but at last he got to the upper side of the break. Here, he sat staring in awe. He did not have to dismount now to feel the trembling and quivering of the ground; it came clear up through his horse's legs and body, through his saddle. Never had he seen anything madder, more hellish, than that muddy, gurgling, roaring water fighting to get through this narrow slit in the hard granite; he wondered if listening to its awful thundering would, in time, deafen a man. It came to him that man, who thinks himself so much, is but a tiny, puny thing when confronted with the terrific forces of Nature; it made him feel dwarfed, insignificant, meek.

The Yuma Kid! The name came to Steve suddenly. Little Jerry Endicott had been right; no human being, no thing of flesh and blood,

could swim or wash through that awful maelstrom alive. Even a fish would be pounded to bits on those jagged, fanglike rocks. If the Yuma Kid had been swept in here—well, the Yuma Kid was dead, his body probably lying, what was left of it, far off in the Gulf of California.

Steve shuddered at the thought of even that cold-blooded murderer meeting such a fate. He turned Conejo, who was trembling, and rode hastily up the bank. Glancing back once, he saw a great cedar, washed down from the mountains, rise suddenly to be tossed almost clear of the water. And then it sank back quickly, as though a huge hand were pulling it, sank back into the greasy, muddy, boiling water and out of sight.

Steve rode two miles up or so, then stopped, looking at the lapping water before him. Far out of the natural banks after all the rain, it was not deep here. But it would be deep in the middle, and he wanted to cross, to get to the Rafter Bar ranchhouse. Uncertainly, he watched tree trunks being swept past, slowly, majestically. A Northern cowboy from the country of many rivers would undoubtedly know how to get over here easily, but what was he to do? He could think of only one thing: go back to that cabin, get some more chuck, and wait a day or two until the flood subsided.

"Good afternoon."

STEVE jerked and whirled; the soft, deep sand had kept him from hearing the approaching horse. The unusual greeting, for the West, was the first surprise; the girl's face was the second. Pretty! No, not pretty—this girl was beautiful! Golden hair, an oval face, blue eyes. But there was one thing that wasn't pretty about her. The supercilious, almost contemptuous manner in which she took stock of him.

"Mawnin', ma'am. How're you-all?" Steve barely remembered in time to use his best Texas accent. "I was a-ridin' chuck line, ma'am."

"You mean you're a mounted tramp?" the girl asked casually.

Steve reddened; he did not have to fake that. "I'm a-lookin' for a job!" he retorted hotly.

"Well, let's ride over to the ranch, and we'll give you something to eat. We wouldn't let anybody go by hungry."

"I," he growled at her, "got money to pay for it, lady."

"We don't happen to be running a boardinghouse. Come on."

It was an order. But when she had ridden a few steps into the water and glanced back, she saw him still sitting his saddle there. "Not afraid of a little water, are you?" she asked mockingly.

"Lady," Steve said promptly, "I ain't scared o' nothin'—I ain't never been carried below the knees, ma'am. A little dribble o' water like this here!" And he started after her. Darn her, anyway! Well, she seemed to live here, and probably knew what she was doing; she had likely swum this creek lots of times on her horse. But he did not like the looks of it. He kept slightly behind her so that she would not see his face. The water came up to her horse's hocks, to his stifles. And suddenly the animal was swimming, the red current almost to the girl's waist. She looked back toward Steve tauntingly.

"All right, Conejo!" said Steve softly, and took the plunge. He managed a grin while she looked back, but he felt mighty uncertain, inside. Dang her, anyhow!

The first few yards were easy. The girl turned in her saddle, inspecting her companion.

"Keep his head upstream!" she ordered.

By the time they got a third of the way across the current was growing faster, faster. Looking out from the bank, one would never have thought it was this bad. They had been swept down five times as far as they had gone across. The girl was turned, looking at Steve again but now her face was white and scared. Hadn't she known, after all, what she was getting into? Suddenly Steve caught his breath.

"Look out! Look out!" he called.

Too late! A great green cedar came up from nowhere and bore down on her, pulled fast by some undertow at its lower branches. She turned, saw it, screamed. Then it had swept upon her and she was gone. Steve saw her horse, freed from her weight, emerge from the branches and go swimming frantically for the far shore.

HEADING Conejo downstream, Steve tried to reach the green cedar, but it swept past him. It kept, tantalizingly, just twenty feet off or so, but no nearer could he get. With staring eyes, he tried to probe through the limbs, along the wet brown trunk. He could see nothing. She was gone, drowned! Dead, to be smashed to pieces in that awful maelstrom at the break!

The break! Why, he was entering the race above it!

"Conejo! Conejo!"

Steve cried it almost in panic. He was spurring madly under water, trying to turn the horse's head upstream again. And then something white and wet showed over the brown trunk of the cedar. A hand! The girl was clinging to the far side of the trunk, trying to scramble up. Her wet, white face appeared, with distended eyes. Her golden hair was streaked across the white of her face.

"Hang on! I'm coming!" Steve yelled encouragingly.

She could not hear him; they were too close to the roar of the break. But she saw him heading toward her. She was half across the trunk now, limp and exhausted. She waved to him; she seemed to be shouting back, and from her wave he understood the words. "Go back! Go back! Save yourself!"

Steve ignored the warning. The cedar was gaining on him. But they were down where currents were tricky. Suddenly his horse shot directly to the cedar. He seized a limb, to pull himself and the horse closer.

"Climb out here! Take the horse!" he shouted.

"Oh, go back!" Even above the roar of the water he could hear her scream. And then another undertow caught the cedar; it rolled half over suddenly. And Steve Mallory? He found himself struggling in the water, clutching at limbs, his horse gone. The girl? Yes, she was still there, clawing back up on the trunk. She was sobbing wildly, her great, scared eyes on him. He jerked his head around, saw the cliffs, the break, seeming to race up toward him. With his stomach across a big limb, he was hastily pulling off his heavy batwing chaps, his spurs, his gun belt. Somehow, he had clawed through the water and the limbs to her side.

"Can you swim?" he shouted.

Her rounded, scared lips said "No!" He grabbed her around the waist, but she clung to the tree and would not turn loose. "Let me go! Let me go! You can make it alone!" she moaned.

With a foot against the trunk, he tore her loose. He shouted in her

ear, as he started swimming clumsily.

"Don't fight me, you little fool. We're—" Then both were sucked under and his words drowned out.

How long were they under? It seemed months, years. Steve's lungs were bursting. If he were to survive, he would have to inhale! Everything was going red, and whirling, and his head was roaring. Or was it the break roaring? He lashed out with his one free hand, with his feet, but he was not an expert swimmer and could not force himself to the surface. His lips began to open in spite of him.

And then his head shot high out of the water and he came up to below his armpits. He took a quick gulp of air, rolled over, to let the girl breathe. She had struggled faintly a while, but now she was limp. Was she dead? And where was he? The break—it was just a few yards below! He was sweeping toward it at terrific speed. The weird thought came to him that he was following the trail of the Yuma Kid to the last.

THEN he was conscious that his feet were being dragged down and his body turned upstream. A dead, blackened snag came shooting up by him. He seized it wildly, and it towed them along. He held the girl up, trying always to keep her head above water. Upstream! And the snag was tearing madly with him in toward the bank. Then the thing was wrenched from his grasp.

A moment later he realized why it had torn loose so strongly, he and the girl were caught across a boulder. His feet sank and touched bottom. Staggering, he went splashing in. He dropped the girl roughly, but the white sand was soft. He sank beside her, coughing, choking. Then he rolled over and looked at the wet, limp figure beside him. Why, her eyes were open, and she was looking at him!

At last they sat up. For the moment Steve was only conscious of how warm it was here, with the dry sun beating down on them!

Presently the girl spoke, her voice low, weak.

"You—saved me!" Steve did not answer, and she went on: "I'd crossed before, when it wasn't so high." And, gaining strength, she turned and burst out: "Why didn't you let me drown? I had it coming, for a fool that I was!"

Steve managed a grin.

"It's bad manners to let girls drown. Haven't you ever heard of a thing called chivalry. That means pulling girls out of creeks and getting them out of other scrapes. His grin became more whole-hearted. "And you're such a spunky little piece, even if you were ornery at first!"

"Thanks," she said gratefully.

They moved back and sat with their backs against the warm rock which they could feel trembling from the flood. Presently Steve turned to the girl.

"Ma'am, like I was a-sayin', I was a-ridin' chuck line, an' I seen that house—"

He gave up, reddening at her grin. "Oh, well," he admitted, "I'm not a Texan, but around a cow outfit, it's just as well to talk like most of the other boys."

"I think I know what you are," the girl told him.

"What?"

"The detective Sam Weaver sent for."

"Huh! So he told you. Well, you're right. I'm a detective and my name's Steve Mallory."

In the eerie light the horseman swept on and once again the ghost of the Yuma Kid had escaped to leave stark terror throughout Skeleton Valley.

"I'm Clara Edwards. How do you do, Mr. Mallory." She held out her hand, and he took it. He held it a long time, and they smiled at each other. She spoke again: "I didn't think a detective would look like you." She blushed and her eyes fell.

"I . . . I think," stammered Steve, "we'll get along all right."

Both were a little self-conscious. Steve sat staring down at the sand between his legs. Something sticking up slightly caught his eye, and he dug it out. It was an old .41 revolver cartridge, empty. He held it in his hand a moment and then, he did not know why, thrust it into his pocket.

"Well, let's go to the ranch," she said.

He helped her up. "You know," he said, "somehow I feel as if I'd known you a long time."

She smiled up at him. "Naturally. When a man saves a girl's life, it makes them pretty close friends. Let's go—Steve."

They started trudging off through the deep sand, side by side. "Here," he said, "let me hold your hand to steady you. Hard walking for a girl."

She did. And presently he spoke again. "Uh-huh! I think we'll get along all right, Clara."

Her face turned up to him, a happy smile on it. After all, was he not at the moment the greatest hero in the world in her eyes, and with good reason? But suddenly, even while he smiled down on her, her face clouded. She gave a sudden, impulsive little pull, and slipped her hand out of his.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Steve, I— Maybe I should have met you a little sooner. No, no! I can walk all right, without any help."

"You—don't like me!"

She turned, and spoke frankly:

"Yes, I do. That's the trouble. Oh, Steve, we're being silly. After all, we've just met!"

"But," he insisted stubbornly, "we'll meet a lot more, Clara."

"No." She shook her head. "It's too late for that."

And from her set face, he knew that it would be useless to ask any questions. They walked on in silence until the ranch buildings were only a hundred yards off. Then, very casually, Steve asked a question:

"What size six-shooter did the Yuma Kid carry?"

"A .41." Clara answered absently, as though her mind were not on the words or on the question.

"I thought so. And you live just above the break where he was supposed to have drowned. Would that have anything to do with—our not meeting too often?"

She stopped short, her eyes opening wide.

"Oh, no, no! I hated him! He was always coming over; he tried to get me to marry him! He was a monster—an inhuman monster, and I always knew it!"

"And in love with you?"

"Ye-yes. But he's dead now."

"Are you sure of that?"

"He is! He is! He must be!" She sounded almost fierce, and she was trembling.

"Queer!" Steve mused. "Everybody's so blamed anxious to convince me that he's dead, but some of 'em sound a little too anxious. Oh, well, I suppose I'll get to the bottom of it some of these days—if the panther doesn't yell at me too often."

CHAPTER IV

STEVE'S INVESTMENT

STEVE had meant to spend about three days at the Rafter Bar, which would allow time for Jerry Endicott to be buried. He spent twice that, and still did not find himself ready to leave. He was "lying down on his job" for the first time in his life. The pleasant Edwards household and the way he fitted in, accounted for some of it. There was Sheldon Edwards, the owner. His story was simple; he had come to Arizona because of tuberculosis; it had broken short his successful career as music teacher in the East, and though he seemed well enough now he probably could never go back to a damper climate. And what a musician he was! He could pick up his violin, a little instrument of wood and catgut, and bring tears to Steve's eyes, or make him laugh, or get his toes wiggling with the urge to dance.

Steve had come to think Clara Edwards the most wonderful pianist in the world, but both she and her father sadly agreed that she was only fair. But their notion of mediocrity set a pretty high standard. Clara's brother Ted sang, in a rather good but none too powerful tenor; he and his sister would indulge in a duet of

an evening, with their father either playing a low obbligato on his violin or accompanying them on the piano. And when they discovered that Steve had a clear, ringing, but untrained barytone, the duo became a trio.

Perhaps it was the music and singing, the pleasant talk around the fireside of an evening, that made Steve stay at the Rafter Bar when he should have been back at the Hangman's Noose attending to his job. Perhaps! On the other hand, it was just possible that his long rides every day with Clara had something to do with it. Strictly cow work, of course—the few cattle had to be looked after, and they were widely scattered. As far as that went, they never reached that intimacy of the time lying in the sand by the break, but they seemed to get along without quarreling, to put it mildly. On those rides, and in the evening talk, Steve learned all about the little outfit and its troubles, which were many. The Edwards family kept nothing from him; they had no secrets from the young man who had saved Clara's life, and almost lost his own doing it.

All one evening Steve had seemed silent, almost moody, as though debating some weighty matter with himself. And next morning he was the same. At the breakfast table he spoke suddenly:

"See here, Mr. Edwards: how many head of cattle do you think you have?"

Sheldon Edwards looked doubtful. "Well, I know a good many have been stolen, but I must have at least four hundred left."

"What do you think, Ted?"

The younger Sheldon gave him a puzzled glance. He was a tall, well-built youth, inclined to be silent. Steve liked him very much, but he had come to the conclusion that Ted was about the poorest cowboy in the world. He meant well, in his somewhat slow way, but he could never get the East out of his system, could never learn how to handle cattle.

"Why-y-y, I think father is slightly high on it," Ted answered now. "I should say . . . well, somewhat over three hundred."

"I hate to have to tell you the truth." Steve jiggled his empty coffee cup. "I'd put it at not over seventy-five head. And those are going every day."

Sheldon Edwards looked suddenly frightened. What was he to do if he lost his cattle, his only means of livelihood?

"Sam Weaver guessed about the same, but we didn't believe him. He wants to buy the place—as a favor to us. Of course," he added hurriedly, "he could make money out of it. He knows more about the business than we do."

Not much more, thought Steve, but a little, probably. "How much patented land do you own?" he asked.

"Why, pretty nearly all Skeleton Valley." Edwards shrugged wryly. "Oh, I was green—a 'green' Easterner. I bought it from the bank in Clarendon without even seeing it. It looked big on paper. I put my life's savings into it and the cattle."

"Mind telling me what Weaver's offering you for the outfit?"

"My boy, we have no secrets from you. He has offered me ten thousand, and he hinted that he might pay more."

Ten thousand! Why, that was ridiculous, Steve thought. It was not worth half that. Something wrong there!

"Well,"—Steve shrugged—"that lets me out. I have about twenty-one hundred saved. I thought of

offering it to you for a half interest."

"Could you," asked Edwards, "make it pay?"

"Yes, I could; I think I'm a pretty good cattleman, as cattlemen go. The ranch would never be anything big. At the best, a good living for all of us; but after all, what more can anybody get in this world?" He did not mean it to happen, but his eyes fell on Clara's golden hair for just an instant. Perhaps he was thinking of something more.

Edwards had obviously been doing some thinking. He spoke deliberately: "I never did like the notion of selling. I rather like your offer, and with you running things, it might even be financially the best in the end. I think I'll take—"

"One moment, father." Clara stood up. "Steve, I'd like to talk to you alone a moment."

MYSTIFIED, Steve followed her onto the porch. She stood gazing down the barren valley, over the white sand, until the wall of the rim stopped her view; that was at the break where the creek went through. Suddenly she turned. She seemed to be trying to conceal her agitation. She spoke quietly, in a very low voice:

"Steve, are you—did you make your offer because of me?" she asked, flushing.

"Yes!" he said impulsively. "Of course we haven't known each other long, but we get along so well, and . . . and— Well, Clara, after a while—" His smile told the rest.

Clara's lovely face could be very serious on occasion. It was that way now. She turned to him gravely.

"Steve, I think it's time I told you that I'm engaged to be married. The wedding is to be a month from Tuesday. Father and Ted don't know about it yet; they don't care much for the man."

It was like a blow between the eyes to Steve. Only now did he realize how much he thought of this golden-haired girl. Why, he was in love with her, and there was no way out of it! But he, too, could be hard-headed when necessary. He spoke quietly.

"Congratulations, Clara; and I wish you the happiest marriage in the world. Who's the lucky man?"

"Sam Weaver."

"Wh-what!" he gasped. He could see the great, misshapen jaw, the immense, bony hands, the awkward movements. He thought of the dull brain, the stupidity of this sheepman who was going broke in the cattle business. He could see the bushy, old-fashioned mustache. Clara married to a man like that, twice her age, apparently! His blood boiled with fury at the thought of it. But he would say nothing; he would have to keep his thoughts to himself.

Clara spoke again, an odd note in her voice. "He's been very good to us, Steve. We'd have been broke long ago but for his cowboys helping us. He's the kindest man in the world. Father—he's still sicker than he looks; he can do nothing to make a living. Sam has just about kept us going."

"So that's it!" said Steve, and he could not quite keep all the bitterness out of his tone.

"No, Steve; that isn't all. I like Sam a lot. As I say, he's the gentlest and kindest man in the world. Of course—" The words seemed forced out of her, as though she felt she owed them to Steve. "Of course, I met no other men, away out here. Possibly if I'd met you sooner, two months ago, even—"

"You love him?" he asked, his eyes fastened on hers.

"I do, Steve." She met his glance squarely.

"You're not telling the truth, Clara!" he blurted before he could catch himself.

Her lips trembled a trifle. And then her head went back.

"I do love him! And if I didn't, I'd do the right thing, and keep my word." She was again the proud girl he had seen first on the bank of the swollen wash. No matter what it cost her, she would always regard a promise as sacred.

"Well, Clara, that's that," Steve said quietly. "So I suppose you don't want me to buy that half interest?"

"Would it be a good investment for you?"

"I think so. In fact, I know it would."

"Then, take it if you want to. It would only be a relief to Sam. I don't"—she flushed a trifle—"I don't like the idea of his giving father money for charity."

They stood looking at each other a moment more, then Steve turned on his heel and went in. Edwards was smiling as though he knew something. Without a word, Steve sat down and wrote a check, for two thousand one hundred dollars; it would leave only a few cents in his bank account. He handed it to Edwards.

"Well, we're pardners now," Steve said, somewhat glumly.

"Fine! Fine!" He chuckled knowingly. "I wonder what you and Clara were talking about out there?"

"Business," said Steve brusquely. "Clara and I mean nothing to each other. We're good friends, that's all."

Ted's surprise was apparent. "Why, I thought—" He looked at his father, whose face had fallen. But the elder man straightened his features quickly. He came forward, placed a friendly hand on Steve's shoulder.

"My boy, frankly, I had hopes.—Well, I think you understand. Ted and I like you very much. But the other thing is your business, and Clara's." He shrugged.

THAT day Steve rode alone. He rode hard and covered most of the range of which he now owned half. He picked out a site for an earthen dam; he would have to find more sites. Making the cattle cross the barren valley to water would keep them too poor, would even keep them from breeding as rapidly as they should. Yes, he had made a good investment, barely a good investment and no more. Perhaps he could get some idea of cow work into Ted's head, and save hiring another cowboy when they had built up the herd. He and Ted and Ted's father there, "batching"—they'd get along all right.

That evening at supper Clara was unnaturally silent, her silence sometimes interspersed with bursts of unnatural garrulity. And in spite of all she had done to hide it, Steve could notice a slight redness around her eyelids. She ate very little. And Steve, in spite of his hard day's riding, found that he was not hungry, either. He was too 'tired' that night for the usual singing and music, so he went to bed early. The other two men went to bed soon after. They had a sort of uneasy feeling; they realized that something was wrong, but did not know what.

Lying there, Steve heard a sudden tinkle of the piano. The stray notes formed into a soft melody that he did not know. And suddenly Clara's voice rose. She was singing in Ital-

ian. She did not know Italian, but her father had taught her the sounds, "like a parrot," she had laughed. Her voice rose and fell, swept high, sank again. Never had he heard her sing so; never, probably, had she. All the sadness in the world seemed to come floating unconsciously into that voice, all the hopelessness. And through it all a grim determination. Yes, she would go through with her bargain. Why did some people, like Clara, have to be so square, Steve wondered. But it came to him that that was one of the things he liked most about her; better be too square than too much the other way.

Suddenly, as though realizing what she was doing, the girl stopped singing. He could faintly hear her close the piano, cross the floor to her room. He heard the hinges of her door squeak. Blast Weaver, anyway. What right did he have to win this girl? But Steve too had a strong streak of squareness, of honesty. His first blind bitterness wearing off, he had to admit that Sam Weaver was just what Clara thought him—kind, gentle, the best friend she and her family had. There would be no question that he would make her a good, devoted husband. What if he wasn't any too brainy? He couldn't help that. And as to his looks: well, Steve knew that handsome men didn't always make the best husbands.

CHAPTER V

MURDER STRIKES AGAIN!

THE thing that woke Steve suddenly two hours before daylight was a girl's voice calling his name in utter terror. "Steve! *Steve!*" He jerked straight up in bed. And then he became aware of that other sound, sweeping rapidly down upon the house. The panther yell! Rising, falling, weird and awful, it rushed up until it seemed to be just outside Steve's window. There it stopped for the moment, and in its place came something new—a wild, mocking laugh. Then again the panther yell, retreating rapidly up the valley.

Steve had pulled his boots and trousers on in a flash and had grabbed up a carbine standing in the corner. Clara was in the living room and he spoke to her hastily as he raced through.

"You all right, Clara?"

"Yes—but I'm frightened!" she gasped.

Then Steve was outside, running for the top of the low ridge. The moon broke through the clouds for a moment, and, on the white sand of the valley, he could easily see the horseman go sweeping off in a dead run. He threw up the carbine, fired . . . fired twice. The figure seemed to turn and the wild laugh floated back to him. Steve stared unbelievingly. The horseman was heading directly into Skeleton Creek, which had subsided during the night until now it filled its banks but no more. Steve could see the white splash as the horse leaped in at full speed. Twice more he shot, and then he suddenly saw the thing to do. He went running as he had never run before in his life. The man was above him, and would be swept down some distance before he could get across. If Steve could reach the bank before the man came opposite, he could shoot at close range; he should be able to get him, even in that poor shooting light. If he could only wing him, or cripple the horse slightly, it would serve as well as a center shot. Man and horse would be swept into the break.

Here he came, almost opposite,

and already more than half way across. Steve threw up the carbine, aimed as best he could, pulled the trigger. The saddle out there was empty, the horse swimming higher! Running down the sandy bank, trying to keep abreast, Steve watched for a rising head, for the splash of swimming arms. He did not see either; the horse, alone, was striking out strongly for the far bank. But he would be sure that the man was not clinging to the saddle. He did not like it any too well, but he would have to get the horse. He knelt, took a rest, aimed, and again pulled the trigger. Only a little click came from the gun. He had emptied the magazine, and he had no spare cartridge with him. He stood up, the gun dangling at his side.

And then again, from out there, came that mocking, taunting laugh; the man had seen, and he was not hurt. A head, a hat still on it, shot out before the horse. A splendid swimmer, he was outswimming the horse, leading it. But he seemed to change his mind; perhaps he thought the effort too great. He dropped back, blended with the horse for a moment, and then he was back in the saddle. A great feat of swimming in itself, to mount so neatly and quickly without turning the horse over!

Dumbly helpless, Steve stood and watched the horse climbing out on the far bank. Against the white sand, he could clearly see the rider waving mockingly to him before turning off. The voice came clearly to him across the now fairly narrow channel.

"Hasta la vista, Señor Esteban!"

The man went riding off in a leisurely, taunting jog, leaving Steve Mallory gazing after him, helpless to do anything. It came to him that the call had not been *"Adios"*—"Good-by," but *"Hasta la vista!"*—"Until I see you again!" A threat, open, menacing. In perfect Spanish, without a trace of accent. So the "ghost" was a Mexican. Or he could be an American reared down along the border where everybody spoke Spanish as fluently as English, and as naturally. Somebody reared around Yuma, for instance. Yuma! Where the Colorado River was wide, muddy, swift, with treacherous currents! A boy of reckless disposition reared there might well become a remarkable swimmer in waters such as that—or this.

STEVE heard Clara calling to him from a distance. Far as it was, he could hear the terror still in her tones. He turned and went running. Clara and her father were on the porch, waiting for him; the man had his arm around her shoulders. She spoke quickly, hysterically.

"Ted! He's gone!"

"Gone! Where?"

Steve burst into the house, into Ted's room. A glance showed him that the bed had been slept in. A second, and he saw part of the young man's clothes lying on a chair—shirt, hat, socks. Only boots and trousers were gone. There was a door opening directly to the outside from Ted's room. Steve rushed to it, but a thought struck him just as he pulled it open, and he closed it again and dashed through the house to the porch. He called Ted's name over and over again but there was no answer. Only dead silence save for the murmur of the river down there, the roar of the break coming up to them from the foot of the valley. Steve returned to the others. Sheldon Edwards was white, but he was keeping himself together with surprising fortitude.

"Let's," he suggested, "go to Ted's room and look for tracks outside the door."

"No, we'd better wait till daylight, so we won't ruin them." Steve turned to Clara. She would be better off doing something than sitting there shaking like a leaf. "Clara, would you make us some hot coffee? It would brace us up."

She went to the kitchen, and he heard the clank of stove lids. It was a long wait, and hard on all of them, but he would not let them go outside until the sun was just rising. Then he led the way, carefully. Immediately, he saw the tracks of horseshoes, coming in beside the wall under Ted's open window. Then from the doorway the clear print of boot heels in the sand. These prints and the horse's tracks went off together, side by side. Steve followed them a hundred yards or so, and suddenly he whirled.

"Go back, both of you! Go back to the house!"

They did not want to, but he insisted. He stood a moment, pain in his eyes, watching them go. Edwards had his arm around Clara, supporting her. Steve stood there until they had dragged slowly up the porch steps, entered. Then he went on. A few yards ahead—he had seen it before sending them back—the heel prints suddenly ceased. Where they did, there was a blotchy blur in the sand. Stooping over it, Steve saw a few drops of dried blood. Then the horse tracks went on, and behind them the ground was scraped, in a long mark such as one makes dragging a roped calf up to the branding fire.

The thing was easy to read. The rider had struck the unsuspecting Ted on the bare head, probably with his gun barrel, as he walked alongside. He had flipped his rope over his neck or feet, and started off with him. It was hardly necessary to follow this gruesome trail, but Steve did. He followed it to the river, to where the horse turned back, with longer, freer stride. With hanging head and slow steps, Steve returned to the house, where he found Clara and her father seated at the living-room table. They looked up at him without speaking. His face told the story; he did not need to say anything. Clara burst into tears, hiding her face in her hands. Sheldon Edwards paled.

"What happened?" he asked.

Steve spoke reluctantly. "Somebody rode up to his window and called him, whispered to him to come out. He did. The . . . the river was—"

Edwards nodded dully, hopelessly; he had been watching Steve through the open doorway as he followed that trail, and he knew already.

"Is there—any hope?" he asked in a low voice.

"No," Steve admitted. What hope could there be for an unconscious man thrown into that raging river, to be swept into the break, pounded to pieces. And, struck on the bare head, it was more than likely that poor Ted was dead before he reached the bank.

"The—Yuma Kid?" muttered Sheldon.

"Was Ted friendly with him? Did he know him well?"

Sheldon shook his head. "He hated him—the Yuma Kid used to come around here and annoy Clara. All of us disliked him very much, but he was—mad about Clara, and could not leave her alone."

"Would Ted have gone out if the Yuma Kid called him?"

"Absolutely not! He knew about

those other murders, and he would have been afraid, if nothing else. And he went out without even his gun?"

"That means," said Steve grimly, "that whoever called him was somebody he knew well, and trusted, somebody he wasn't afraid of. After the things that have been going on around here, a man with his sense wouldn't have gone out that way with anybody else, unarmed."

There was a long, uncomfortable silence. At last Steve got up.

"I'll saddle a horse and ride along the bank. If I don't find—anything—I'll keep on to Clarendon and have the sheriff send some men out to search. Some of them can cross at the bridge there and come up the other bank."

Clara spoke dully.

"I'll get you some breakfast while you're saddling."

He tried to persuade her not to bother, but she went blindly, heedlessly to the kitchen and again he heard the rattle of stove lids. He roped and saddled a horse and returned to the house. He ate food which was tasteless to him and gulped down several cups of strong coffee. As he was leaving, Edwards came up and handed him a pair of binoculars in a leather case. Steve nodded, and tied the case to his saddlehorn.

IT did not take him long to get to the break. Ted's body was not on the near bank, and, aided by the strong glasses, he was pretty sure that it did not lie on the far side. Near the break, he dismounted at the spot where he and Clara had rested after their narrow escape from the water. Their tracks were still there, the prints of their bodies. He knelt and raked his fingers through the loose sand. And when he stood up he had five more empty and discolored .41 cartridges in his hand. The Yuma Kid had emptied his gun back at the posse. And when he had crawled out here, he had flipped the empties out and reloaded his gun. So he had escaped alive.

Or—Steve rubbed his chin—or there was somebody so devilishly clever as to have planted these empties, hoping they would be found. It came to Steve that if he ever reached an answer to this thing, it would be something weird, unnatural. Not a ghost, but something about as strange.

He circled widely and got up on that high granite wall over the crack. How to get down on the other side, he did not know; he should have asked at the ranch, but all of them had been too disturbed to think of that. It took him almost an hour to find the trail, half a mile from the crack; it dropped down suddenly between two boulders. A dangerous, steep trail it was, following little ledges that often sloped outward, but at last he got down to the bottom. He made his way back to the lower side of the break and continued on down, often stopping to peer at the far bank through the glasses.

Several miles down, he saw a rider coming toward him. He dismounted and inspected him through the glasses. He was a short, red-faced young cowboy on a roan horse. From his way of riding, he seemed disturbed, excited. Once Steve saw him pull out a blue handkerchief and mop his face. He turned away from the bank to head him off, and the man, seeing him, turned toward him. They met and the cowboy said:

"Howdy. You . . . you ain't from the Rafter Bar, are you?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm afraid I got shore bad news for you. The sheriff sent me up here. It's Ted Edwards. They found him, drowned. His head was all bashed in something awful, an'—an' he's dead," he finished lamely.

"Come on back to the ranch with me," said Steve.

"No, thanks," the rider said hastily. "I don't want to meet the old man an' Ted's sister. They'll be all upset." The cowboy hesitated, and turned back toward town.

Steve turned, too, and rode back sadly. Until his meeting the man, he had entertained a wild, feeble hope that, somehow, Ted Edwards might be alive.

CHAPTER VI

WEAVER PROVES A HERO

IT was late afternoon when Steve reached the Rafter Bar. Approaching it, he heard the bawling of a small herd being held. He was surprised at this, but when he rode up he found that it was Sam Weaver with four of his cowboys. They had gathered the cows with unbranded calves on the far side of the Rafter Bar and driven them in here for easier branding in the corrals. The Hangman's Noose range completely encircled this small Edwards outfit. It turned out that the five men had spent the night at a camp far up in the hills, having crossed Skeleton Creek where it forked into three parts and so was comparatively easy to ford.

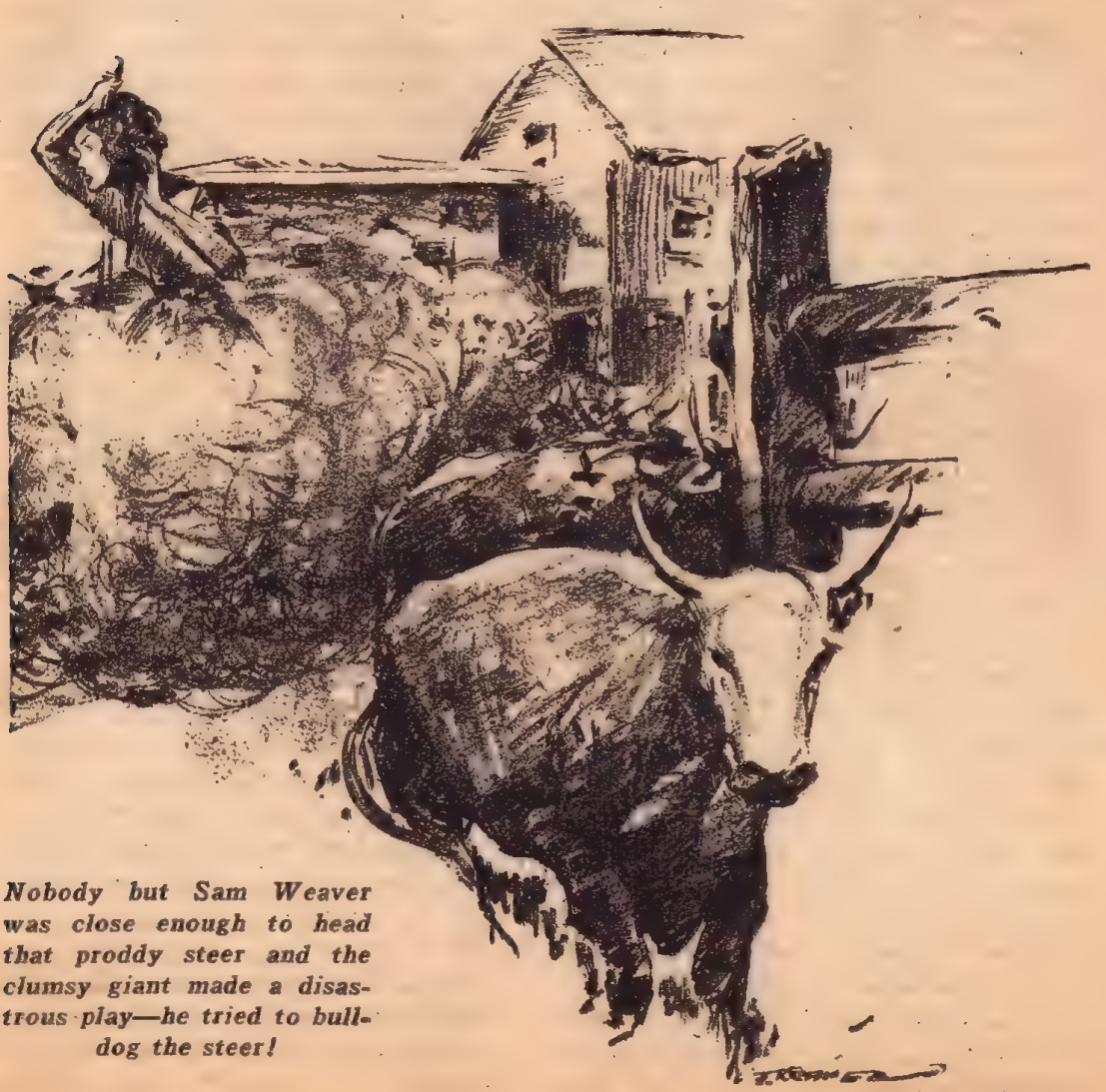
The four cowboys were holding the herd, and Weaver himself stood near the porch with the girl and her father. When Steve broke the news, he saw Weaver's huge hand go comfortingly to the girl's shoulder. His eyes were on her, and no second glance was needed for Steve to see how whole-heartedly this clumsy, good-natured man loved Clara Edwards. She and her father, both overcome, turned to enter the house. Sam Weaver took a step after them, his heavy face anxious, and stopped. He looked at Steve as though asking his advice.

"I wouldn't," said Steve. "I'd leave 'em alone a while."

"But—"

"Let's go work that bunch of cattle of yours; it'll give us something to do."

They did. As a rule, the boss does the cutting of a herd, but Steve noticed that Weaver left this to one of his cowboys, while he himself took the comparatively simple task of holding the cut, a task for a boy. And even this he did badly, with twice as much riding as was necessary. And once when his horse whirled quickly he grabbed the saddlehorn and almost fell off. It seemed that he knew practically



Nobody but Sam Weaver was close enough to head that proddy steer and the clumsy giant made a disastrous play—he tried to bulldog the steer!

nothing of riding, and even less of cattle. It made Steve wonder how long it would be until he went broke and had to go back to sheep; certainly not long.

They were almost through cutting when they saw Clara coming slowly from the house and toward them. That is, Steve saw her, but Sam Weaver did not; the latter was having a bad time heading off a four-year-old steer with wicked horns that was trying to break bunch—all the cattle were very wild, and it took experienced cowboys to handle them properly. And Sam's inexpert handling had only succeeded in getting the big steer "on the prod." The animal charged the man furiously, head down. But Sam's horse knew more of cattle than he did. It eluded the sharp horns deftly, almost throwing its clumsy rider. And then it was tearing away at full speed from the herd. Suddenly Steve saw the danger. Clara was directly in the path of the steer!

"Look out! Look out!" he yelled frantically; he himself was too far off to reach her in time.

Weaver saw her at that moment. He raked the spurs into his big sorrel and went tearing after the steer. He already had a loop built, which he had been using to whip the cattle. He was waving it over his head.

Steve, racing to the spot as fast as his horse would go, groaned. Why, Weaver was not circling his rope over his head with the easy wrist motion of a cowboy; he was throwing it back and forth with his whole arm. How could he expect to catch anything that way! Then he released the loop and it shot out, doubling and twisting—not the smooth throw of a cowboy. But suddenly Steve caught his breath in relief. By some miracle, the loop fell awkwardly over the steer's neck. He saw Weaver's horse slide and set its feet expertly, without a touch of the reins.

In the next instant tragedy again entered the picture. The rope had parted at the honda, and the steer was tearing toward the girl again. Steve was still racing, spurring, quirting. But he knew that he would be a split second too late. Already the wicked horns were lowering for the toss. Too terrified even to scream, the girl stood with her hands to her white face, not making a sound.

And Weaver, a few feet before Steve, was riding madly, too; his horse had brought him almost even with the steer. And then the incredible happened. Weaver's horse was streaking on with an empty saddle, and the man himself was rolling on the ground, the steer's horns in his huge hands. He had bulldogged the steer—hoolihaned it! And so close had been the shave that the steer, rolling, had knocked Clara down, but without injuring her. Steve slid to a stop; he saw Weaver's face, white as paper, looking up at him, the great mustache sticking out.

"Wh-what do I do now?"

"Let him up," said Steve grimly. "That'll have taken the fight out of him. If it didn't—" He drew his gun, his lips thin.

WEAVER released the horns and went running around Steve's horse for protection. The steer, having gained its feet, trotted meekly back to the herd, through with bunch-breaking and fighting for that day at least. Steve swung quickly from his saddle and held out his hand.

"Weaver, that was about the bravest thing I ever saw, especially for a man like you to do."

"Why . . . why—" The rancher

seemed ill at ease, confused, and beads of perspiration ran down his face. "I'd seen it done in shows. Clara—I couldn't let her get hurt!"

"No, and you didn't." The girl was coming up to them, and Steve turned to her. "Clara, Mr. Weaver's as brave a man as I've ever met. I want to congratulate you both on your engagement."

Weaver had his arm around Clara. Steve turned slowly, went to his horse, and mounted. He rode slowly back to the herd. Not one more word would he say to Clara Edwards; never again would he go riding with her. He had let his jealousy blind him to Sam Weaver's merits, to his bravery. Well, he'd play fair from now on, and not try to get Clara's mind away from the man to whom she was engaged.

In a few minutes Weaver rode up to Steve.

"I heard you bought a half interest in the little outfit, Steve. Wish you hadn't. Between the two of us, this valley, with the running water always, would be worth a lot more to me than it ever will to you."

"That's right," nodded Steve; it took only a moment's thought to show the truth of it.

"I'd like to buy you out; I'll give you a lot more than you paid."

"Sure—I'll sell," Steve agreed. After what had happened today he'd be only too glad to get as far away from here as he could. "We'll talk it over after the funeral. What's to be done about that?"

"Ted'll be buried in Clarendon. Clara and her dad are both goin' in of course, an' I'm goin' with 'em."

"I'll go along, too. I'd come to think a lot of Ted."

"Uh-huh—fine young feller, Ted was. Fine young feller! Clara's too upset to cook; you're all havin' supper with me. The cook's getting' it ready up that little draw."

The cook. Steve thought nothing of it until he was riding there beside Weaver. Close to the campfire, he stared.

"Why, it's Diego! He came back!"

"Sure! He said he was drunk, an' took a notion at night to go see a girl he's stuck on over at the Flying Box Ranch. Well, when he come back, I bawled him out proper, an' told him I'd found out about him smokin' that marijuana stuff." Weaver's heavy face softened. "The poor fellow, he broke down an' nearly cried. He swears he'll quit it, an' I didn't have the heart to fire him. Besides, Jerry liked him; he wouldn't have wanted to see him fired."

Of all the soft-hearted fools Steve had ever met, of all the gullible simpletons, this Sam Weaver was the worst! Steve said nothing then, but he had a talk with Diego. The man was free from the drug at the time, and while he seemed inclined to be silent, and suspicious of Steve, it was very plain that he was far from being a fool. He struck Steve, on the contrary, as being a very clever young fellow. And, oddly enough, pleasant and likable. But the Yuma Kid was said to have been a likable man, too—until he stuck a knife in one's back. As Steve left Diego, Weaver walked up to him and drew him aside. He spoke anxiously.

"Say, Steve, you don't really think Diego had anything to do with the killing of poor Jerry, do you? Why should he?"

"The Yuma Kid killed him," said Steve shortly.

"Huh! But the Yuma Kid's dead, ain't he?"

"No. And I've a good notion he's not more than fifty yards off right now."

WEAVER stared around in horror, and then followed Steve's eyes to where the young Mexican stood, seemingly not even watching them as he calmly puffed a brown cigarette.

"You mean—"

"I mean you'd better watch your step, and see that your door and windows are fastened every night," Steve said bluntly. "And better not ride around alone; have a man or two that's fast with a gun with you. Just as well you didn't fire Diego; if he's doing anything, we can catch up with him all the sooner if we know just where he is. And, by the way, do you know if he left camp last night?"

"Left? Why, no. I mean, I don't think he did; I was asleep."

"Didn't notice any horse this morning with fresh sweat on him?"

"Huh? Why, a big, long-legged grulla. But I didn't pay much attention."

"A big, long-legged grulla. That fits the horse I saw the man riding last night, as well as I could tell by moonlight."

"Huh! But what do we do?"

"Nothing, now, only act as if you haven't seen anything unusual. We must wait till we have real evidence. And I think I'm not far from it!"

It was a long ride to town. Because of the dangerous trail down the rim, they did not start until the moon was well up. All the way, Steve and Sheldon Edwards rode ahead, with Weaver and Clara behind. Needless to say, the stricken father rode in almost complete silence. It gave Steve a lot of time to think, and think he did. On that long, moonlight ride, things came to him that he had not noticed in the heat of excitement. Gradually, his face grew harder, and a dangerous look came into his eyes.

Next morning, after only two or three hours' sleep, Steve called on the doctor who had performed the autopsy on Ted's body. No water in the lungs, so he had not drowned. At least Ted had not suffered; he had never known what hit him, or even that he had been hit. Steve spent some time closeted with the doctor in his office, and when he came out his face was white and his eyes fairly blazing with fury. Stopping in the doorway he turned back to the medico.

"Who's sheriff here?"

"Dalton Winger—smart, square young fellow. Let me give you a note to him; he's a good friend of mine."

Steve waited for the note, then went to the courthouse, where the sheriff's office was. Dalton Winger turned out to be little older than Steve himself, and a clean-cut, intelligent-looking man. Discovering that they both had punched cattle for the Lazy Slipper, near Globe, though not at the same time, they were friends immediately. But Steve had to cut his visit short to be in time for the funeral.

He had a hard, grim look on his face as he stood beside the newly dug grave and saw the coffin containing Ted's body sinking down slowly. He raised his eyes. Across from him stood Edwards and Clara, both with handkerchiefs to their eyes. And beside Clara was Sam Weaver, one of his great paws holding her hand consolingly; the man seemed as badly upset as the sister and father of the murdered youth.

AFTER the funeral, Steve went back to the hotel, where he exchanged his room for a much larger one. He had a table brought up, so that the four of them could eat in privacy. The meal over, Steve saw

the rest to the door, and turned back into the room. They all slept in town that night, and next morning early started home.

They arrived at the Rafter Bar late in the afternoon, but Weaver, tactfully, decided to go on to his own ranch and leave father and sister alone with their grief. He hunted up Steve.

"Steve, you comin' back with me?"

"Think I'd better?"

"Well, I'd sure like you to," Weaver admitted. "After all, the Noose is the outfit's been havin' the most damage. If you don't mind comin'."

"You're right, Sam. I'll go with you."

The flood had almost subsided now; they found a broad stretch which their horses could wade across without having to swim. In the middle, Weaver looked down at the red water and shuddered; it was lapping at his boots, though he held them high out of the stirrups.

"Shore terrible! To think o' poor young Ted bein' murdered an' throwed in here!"

"Uh-huh," said Steve abstractedly.

"An' . . . an' you really think it's Diego?"

"Uh-huh. Diego."

An hour later, riding along, Weaver spoke again:

"About sellin' me your half interest in the Rafter Bar, Steve— Well, how much you want?"

"Why, I haven't got papers from Edwards yet. We could have had 'em made out in town, but I didn't think that was any time to worry him about business."

"That's right, Steve; it wasn't. Well, when you git 'em made out, I'll give you enough that you'll make a danged good profit on the deal. I sure need that runnin' water."

CHAPTER VII

MARIJUANA

DARK struck them halfway to the Hangman's Noose, but that did not trouble them, for of course Weaver knew the way well—especially well because of his frequent visits to the Rafter Bar to see Clara. There happened to be good cow trails nearly all the way, which made it easier riding until the moon should rise. But, when dusk began to fall, Weaver got a concerned look on his heavy face.

"Do you think we should go this way?" he asked nervously. "Any danger of us bein' layed for by somebody?"

"Not one bit," Steve assured him. "Not as long as everybody knows we're together. The one thing you'll find out about the Yuma Kid's killings, when you think it over, is that everyone of them was yellow—yellowest I ever heard of. He'd only tackle one man alone, and then he'd take no chances whatever. Yellow clear through, like most murderers. Take that business of calling poor Ted out that way, and knocking him on the head, for instance."

"I can't understand Ted goin' out with him that way; he had no use at all for the Yuma Kid, they tell me."

"But Diego?" asked Steve. "Would he be suspicious of Diego? Did he know him well?"

"Why, sure he did; he seemed to like him. You see, when I had a message to send over to the Rafter Bar, about the cattle, or . . . or to Clara, I gen'rally sent Diego with it. When it was late, he'd often stay all night there."

"That's it," said Steve softly. "He whispered in the window that he had a message from you."

"See here, Steve!" Weaver raised his voice half angrily. "You ain't

got nothin' on Diego—an' you know it. You only got a crazy notion that he's the Yuma Kid. Me, I think Diego's a dang fine Mexican, an' I know he's a fine cook. I'd ruther you wouldn't say things like that about him 'less you can prove 'em, an' you shore can't do that."

Steve only laughed softly. He rode on a few feet, and looked back at the other man.

"Weaver, I may know more than you think I do. See here; want to bet? I'll bet you fifty dollars—no, I'll bet you the pay you're giving me for this job, double or quits—that I have the Yuma Kid well inside of a week. I'll make it four days."

"Huh! Have him? You mean, kill him?"

"Oh, no!" Steve laughed again, and this time his laugh was harsh. "That would be too quick, and too good for him. I mean, have him in the hands of the sheriff, so that he can go back to the death cell and have lots of time to think things over before they hang him. He's already a condemned man, and even if he could wrangle a pardon, or somehow get a new trial, it would do him no good, with all these new killings against him. He's as good as doing a jig-dance in the air right now!"

Weaver shuddered and turned his great face in the gloom. "You give me the shivers, you sound so blood-thirsty!"

"I am blood-thirsty, for the first time in my life. Nothing's bad enough for the Yuma Kid; he's the most cold-blooded killer I ever had anything to do with."

TWO miles were covered without word from either of them. It was quite dark now but for a few faint stars. Steve spoke again.

"Queer—sort of makes one feel creepy. This is Ted's saddle I'm riding, and his gun I'm packing; mine washed down into the break on poor Conejo— The break! Do you know what's behind a lot of this stuff goin' on?"

"What?"

"The break," Steve answered bluntly.

"What?" Weaver asked again.

"Uh-huh. The break. I know something about the break—" And once again Steve laughed queerly, wildly.

"See here, Steve!" Weaver's voice came almost timorously through the darkness. "What's the matter with you? Do you know you're talkin' plumb crazylike?"

"Sure I am. Want to know why? Want to know what's upsetting me?"

"What?"

"Well, I'll tell you, just man to man. I know you're all right; you'll understand, and you won't say anything. Funny! Funny as hell, Weaver! I'm in love. Now, isn't that funny?"

"With . . . with Clara?"

"With Clara! The girl you're engaged to. And she likes me plenty, too, Weaver. If she wasn't engaged to you, I'd have some chance with her. And I have a half interest in the outfit. Sam, I'd have tried to beat your time with her only for the way you saved her from that steer. Risked your life, without stopping a second to think. You sure love Clara, don't you, Sam?"

"Of course I do!" Weaver said fervently. "I couldn't live without her, Steve. She's . . . she's a fine gal, Clara is!"

"That steer, now. Did you know that you didn't have a chance in five hundred of coming through alive, or not being crippled for life, when you jumped off on his horns? A man like you that, if you'll excuse me for

saying it, don't know cattle from beans."

"Why, I just didn't think, Steve. I saw Clara in danger, an'—"

"And your own life meant nothing to you at all, beside hers. Funny! Men generally won't talk about love, or admit how they feel. Why? It's the most natural thing in the world."

"We-ll," said Weaver, slowly and heavily, "if you're in love with Clara, I reckon you can't help it any more than I can. But . . . but you're goin' to do the square thing, being as her an' me are goin' to be married soon."

"You bet your sweet boots I am!" said Steve fervently.

Here, the trail narrowed, going through a break between two hills and following a wash. Steve touched his horse with a spur and struck out ahead, in a fast trot. The moon was just rising, and Weaver could plainly see the other man's back bobbing ahead. Steve began to sing, one of those songs he had learned at the Rafter Bar, one of those he and Clara had sung together before all these things happened—murder, an engagement, a charging steer.

"Moonlight on the earth is lying, winds are rustling low.
Where the darkling streams are creeping, dearest, let us go!
All the stars keep watch in heaven while I sing to thee;
And the night to love is given. Dearest, come to me!
Dearest, come to—"

He broke off suddenly, turning.

"You know, I can't hit the high notes on that; it's what they call Schubert's Serenade. But Edwards said I could learn to reach up after 'em, if I'd practice. I'll have to. He said he'd teach me."

"But," Weaver said stupidly, "I thought you weren't going back to the Rafter Bar. After all, Clara an' me—"

"Oh, that! Well, I still have the half interest."

They were coming out of the break between the hills into a narrow little valley, lying pleasant and peaceful in the moonlight. Just outside the mouth of the break, not more than fifty yards off the trail, lay a dark clump of dense cedars. Steve turned toward them, and spoke loudly.

"Nice place, Sam, for the Yuma Kid to be laying for us, isn't it? To plug us in the back. Only thing is, he hasn't got the guts; he's yellow! Nothing's going to happen to either of us, Sam, as long as we're together this way."

Weaver glanced in terror at the dark cedars. He said nothing until a bend in the narrow valley left them out of sight behind.

"What's the idea of you singin' comin' out the break to that place! Are you plumb crazy, Steve?"

Steve Mallory laughed again.

"Well, Sam, I can't figure out myself whether there's method in my madness, or madness in my method—that's Shakespeare. All I know is that I'm not quite as crazy as I may act. Nice night, Sam. That moon's sure pretty!"

AS Steve had predicted, they arrived safely at the Hangman's Noose. Here, the young detective did another queer thing. At the corrals, he did not dismount. Instead, he sat in his saddle, looking down on Weaver.

"I'm going out and sleep somewhere in the cedars where nobody can find me," he explained. "I'll be in for breakfast. You go ahead and go to bed, Sam—but be sure to put that chair against your door and fasten the window. It's me the Yuma Kid wants to get, and quick! You? Oh, he figures maybe that you're not so smart, and that he can

get you later on; no hurry about it. Well, good night, Sam, and I hope you're not so sleepy as to forget about your door." And he went swinging down the little black valley in a fast lope, leaving the rancher staring with open mouth.

Next morning, as he had promised, Steve was back for breakfast. He had come back in time to shave and tidy himself up. After breakfast, he went to the little blacksmith shop and began to rummage around among the usual pile of old horseshoes, rusty bars, old bolts from wagons, and such things. He found what he wanted, and returned with it to the house. Hearing pounding, Weaver went back to Steve's room. He rubbed his great jaw, staring.

"Wh-what you doin'?"

"Fixing this bolt on the inside of my door, Sam. See; I've doubled the rod through so that the nuts are on the inside. Nobody could unscrew them outside and get in at me that way. And I'm going to put one as good on the window."

For the first time, Sam Weaver showed something approaching anger.

"See here, Steve! I send for you to help me out, an' what in tarnation are you doin'? Looks to me like you're worryin' a lot more about your own life than about mine. Maybe you're thinkin' that if I was dead, if the Yuma Kid got me— I mean, you an' Clara—"

Steve stopped working and looked at the older man. "But I've told you, Sam, that you're in no danger whatever till I'm attended to. This business of sleeping out in the cedars is too cold, and—"

He stopped, as Weaver whirled suddenly, holding up his great hand.

"Wait!" Weaver whispered. "Diego! He was peepin' out at us through a crack in the kitchen door."

"That's funny!" remarked Steve. "And I thought you said Diego was such a nice, harmless Mexican—half Mexican. Don't forget that he was a cousin to the Yuma Kid, and even looks like him."

WEAVER gave up. But that night Steve heard him blocking his door very thoroughly, and heard him fumbling at the window. Nothing happened all night. And all next day Steve never left the house once. He spent part of the time lying on the bed in his room, reading, and most of the rest playing solitaire in the living room. Next day was the same, except that he went back to the kitchen and washed the extra set of clothes which he had brought. So desperately did he seem to be trying to kill time that he even ironed the shirt.

On the third morning, Weaver came up to Steve, annoyance on his heavy face.

"Listen here, Steve. I don't like to have to say anything, but what did I send for you for? Here you are, sittin' around the house all day, not doin' a thing. Seems like you ought to be ridin' around tryin' to find out something!"

Steve looked at him good-naturedly.

"Sam, there's where you're wrong. You'd never know it to see me, but I've been working the hardest I've ever worked—it sure was a strain on me. And, besides, you forget about our bet. If I haven't got the Yuma Kid by tomorrow, you'll owe me nothing at all. Not only that, but I'll have to pay Bryan his part of the thing."

"Money be damned!" Weaver burst out. "I wish you'd try to do something!"

"All right! All right!" Steve gave in easily. "Some of the boys are

driving a herd over to Long Tank today, aren't they? I think I'll go along and help."

"We-ll, I don't see what good that'll do. But anything to make you act like you're awake."

Before he left, Steve went back to the kitchen to get some matches. Rolling a cigarette, he stopped for a moment's chat with Diego; he had gradually been striking up a friendship with the Mexican. They talked of inconsequential matters a few moments, and suddenly Steve faced the half-breed.

"Diego, I've been scared lately. Sometimes I wonder if I'm going crazy."

"How is that, señor?" Diego spoke politely, but Steve saw his eyes twitch and jerk up to him.

"Oh, I don't know." He hesitated. "I get streaks, get to seeing things. Girls, beautiful girls and things like that. It's . . . it's a fine feeling, but it scares me. A man doesn't see things like that unless there's something wrong with his mind."

"No, señor." Watching, Steve saw that Diego's hands were shaking, and his face had gone pale under its brown.

"Ever have anything like that happen to you?"

A plate dropped from the young Mexican's hands and broke on the floor. He stooped and slowly picked up the pieces. Standing again, he avoided Steve's eyes.

"No, señor. Oh, no! I have never had that happen to me."

"Well, I just wondered," said Steve softly, and walked out.

Driving the herd was a blessed relief to Steve, after his days indoors. It was almost dark when he returned and he had just time to wash up before dinner. He and Weaver had been eating together in the living room of the main house, and he strolled in there. The first thing he saw was Diego finishing the setting of the table. Steve's eyes narrowed as he saw the man's glaring, wild eyes, his trembling hands, a sort of looseness to his lips. When the Mexican went back to the kitchen, Steve turned to Weaver.

"Notice him?"

"Huh?"

"Hopped up again. Full of marijuana. First time since we got back. Make darned sure of your door tonight, Weaver. And I think I'm going to win my bet with you."

"But he said he'd quit it!"

"Of course. He didn't want to lose his job here."

They went on eating, Diego serving the food without a word to them, but with that mad glitter in his eyes. He did not glare at them as on the other night when he was this way; he seemed to be trying hard to keep his eyes away from Steve. And once they heard him stop in the hall, talking in a high, tense voice, as though to somebody not there.

"What," asked Weaver anxiously, "do you think I should do with him? Reckon I'll have to fire him. Or could I send him somewhere and get him cured? Jerry sure thought a lot of Diego."

Steve split another biscuit and buttered it. "I wouldn't worry. I'm going to cure him of it tonight some time—cure him for good."

"You're not drinking your coffee."

"I have a bad tooth that's sort of sensitive," Steve explained. "I'm waiting for the coffee to cool so it won't hurt it."

They continued their meal. Suddenly Steve stopped in the middle of something he was saying and cocked his ears.

"Say," he whispered, "Diego *is* talking to somebody back there now!

That mad killer was looking for Steve —and Steve didn't even have a gun!

Sounds like it, anyhow. Wish you'd go see."

"Why, I didn't hear him at all!" Weaver said but he got up and hurried into the passageway. Immediately, Steve swept up his cup of coffee and emptied it into the top of his boot, which was outside his trousers. When Weaver returned, almost instantly, Steve was just lowering the cup from his lips.

"I didn't hear him talkin'," said Weaver.

"I must have been mistaken. Anyhow, he wasn't peeping in that door at us. Say, this is sure good coffee."

"Another cup?" Weaver asked hospitably.

"No, thanks; more than one cup keeps me awake. Well, let's play a game of cribbage."

WEAVER had to yell several times before Diego came to clear the table. The cribbage game began, but in a minute or two Steve began to yawn. He rubbed his eyes dazedly with the back of his hand.

"I'm getting awful sleepy," he apologized. "Think I'll—go to bed." He finished with a heavy yawn.

Weaver looked anxiously at him as he got up and went blundering toward the door.

In the hallway, Steve met Diego. He spoke thickly to him.

"Diego—you, Diego. I see—pretty girl. Clara—it's Clara. Soon—Clara—I get—married. Weaver fool! Think he marry her—"

He staggered blindly through his door, and the strong bolt shot into place. There was a heavy, sick groan, and a squeak of springs, as he fell face down across the bed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE YUMA KID

THE moon was on the other side of the house, but there was pretty good light in Steve's room, after his eyes accustomed themselves to it.

He slid silently out of bed and sat on the shabby carpet on the floor. Here, slowly, carefully, he pulled off his right boot. Taking an empty bottle out of the dressing table and, pinching the boot top to form a spout, he poured the cold coffee in. Then he corked the bottle.

"Exhibit A," he told himself, putting the bottle back into the drawer.

He pulled off the other boot, and padded silently across to the bed again, where he arranged the blankets methodically to form a high ridge down the middle. Then he went back to the dark corner behind the dressing table and seated himself on the floor.

He had a long wait—two or three hours. Everybody else on the ranch had to be allowed time to go to bed. Still, nothing happened. It became darker, until there was hardly any light in the room. Perhaps that was it; the Yuma Kid had seen the rising clouds and was waiting for them to cover the moon.

And suddenly Steve tensed. Had he heard a faint scraping sound? He knew that the hinges of his door had been oiled so that they would not squeak. He knew too that the bars, where they were bent through outside and brought back, had been sawed through, the cuts filled with some mixture of about the same color as the iron, probably soap and soot. That was why he had spent those idle days in the house; to prevent that until he was ready.

The door was opened so quietly he was not even aware of it, but he very dimly saw a shadow steal, crouched, across the room and toward the bed. He saw a swinging arm, and something thudded down on the bed with a heavy thump.

Steve ran the two steps in his stocking feet, and leaped. He grabbed to pin the man's elbows behind his back. Thinking himself by far the wirier and stronger of the two, he had no thought of danger—and he wanted his captive alive. But his hands seized only thin air; the man had turned and leaped aside with the agility of a weasel. There was something entirely unnatural about that amazing quickness of hearing and acting. And then, before Steve could recover his balance, could think what to do next, the figure had leaped back upon him. Again the arm was swinging. But Steve managed to dodge it, to seize the thing aimed at his head. It was a queer, long, soft thing, but heavy.

He got his arms around the man. But again came a show of that unbelievable quickness of thinking and acting; before Steve's muscles could tense to hold him, the man had twisted somehow, and darted off like an eel. Then he was somewhere in the darkness—no telling where. A sudden panic swept over Steve. He should have used his gun! He had heard of this unearthly agility of the mind and body of one under the influence of marijuana, but he had never realized what it meant. And the drug had given the man unnatural strength, too.

And then the killer leaped in, a knife in his hand. His weirdly active senses had let him find Steve and creep close to him without a sound; he too was in stocking feet. The blade stung Steve lightly across the left ribs as he dodged. He lashed out with his fist and he struck somewhere on the man's body, he did not know where. He heard the man fall, and leaped to pin him down. But the killer was not there, although it seemed incredible that he could have got back to his feet and dodged away in such a flash.

Guided by some instinct, Steve threw himself aside, but the sharp

blade of a knife burned down across his shoulder. Again he struck out, and this time found the man's face by accident. He heard him fall, but did not dare follow up. His gun was hanging on the head of the bed; he would give anything to have it in his hand now, but he dared not try to reach it. He could only crouch, holding his breath.

THEN, for a moment, the moon broke clear through a hole in the clouds. Steve saw his door jerking open, saw a back disappearing. He flung himself across the room. Whatever happened, he could not let the man get away! In the hallway, he caught him; by the better light at the moment, he just managed to seize the wrist of the knife hand. Back and forth they struggled, in silence except for their heavy breathing. Steve's attacker was not only the stronger of the two, but he seemed to have more than human strength. For a moment Steve was gripped by panic. Who would not fear a man completely crazed by a heavy dose of marijuana? Over the other's shoulder, Steve saw his door jamb. Quickly, as a last hope, he locked the back of his knee around the killer's and flung him backward; he threw up his left hand against his opponent's chin to force the head back. It worked! The bare head struck the door jamb, and a crumpled figure lay huddled there.

Steve ran to his dressing table and pulled out a pair of handcuffs. He raced back, snapped one on. And then a better idea came to him: he picked the figure up, threw it on the bed, and handcuffed the other wrist around the heavy iron post. He had caught the Yuma Kid!

Still gasping from the wild fight, Steve managed to light the kerosene lamp and turn up the wick. Then he wheeled and stood looking down on the bed. Two glaring, pin-point eyes were staring up at him with all the hate of hell itself in them.

"Well, Sam," Steve said quietly. "Got caught at last, didn't you? I didn't drink that coffee soaked with marijuana juice; I figure you'd enough in it to knock me completely out."

He moved, and his toe touched something. Stooping, he picked up a long, slender sack made of canvas, evidently from a piece of an old tarp. He let wet sand trickle from it through his fingers.

"Didn't want any blood, did you? Meant to sneak me out of here and dump me over the edge of some canyon, and say I'd just ridden off." He shrugged. "Too hopped up to talk, Sam? Well, I'll see you tomorrow when you've slept it off."

With a rope he got in the kitchen, he tied both the Yuma Kid's ankles to the foot of the bed. He was taking no chances whatever on his getting away. He went into Diego's room and struck a match. The handsome half-breed was sprawled across the bed on his back, breathing heavily, fully dressed.

"Poor devil, being doped all this time and didn't know it. Weaver was sure clever to blame things on him in a pinch. He must have hired him because he was related to the Yuma Kid and looked like him."

All that night Steve sat in his room with Weaver, watching until the killer fell into a heavy, drugged sleep like that which held Diego. Even after that Steve only dozed in snatches. Two hours after daylight, he heard steps, and two men came down the hall, two men with their spurs and chaps still on.

"Why, hello, Dalt," said Steve. "I see you got here on time. What did you find out?"

The young sheriff stared wide-eyed at the man on the bed. Weaver was awake now, and his great face was yellow with fear.

"Here," said Steve grimly, "is the Yuma Kid. Take him in."

"The Yuma Kid! You mean he's been playin' Yuma Kid tricks?"

"No. Weaver's the Yuma Kid himself."

Dalton looked at Steve as though he thought he had gone completely mad. Steve nodded toward the man who had come with the sheriff.

"This the fingerprint man from Phoenix?" he asked.

It was. With a somewhat bored look on his face, the man pulled a long envelope from his pocket and took a paper from it. He examined the smudges on it and then, at Steve's bidding, picked up one of the manacled hands. He looked from paper to fingertips and his eyes opened in astonishment. Jerking erect, he faced the sheriff, so surprised he could hardly speak.

"Why . . . why, it *is* the Yuma Kid! The prints match!

"Did you ever hear of a disease called acromegaly?" Steve asked Dalton. "The bones begin to grow suddenly, especially those of the lower jaw and the hands and feet. In another year, this man would be a horrible sight, at the rate it's going. The doctor in Clarendon didn't know much about the disease, but he thought it might be possible to bring it on artificially by taking a lot of extract of a certain gland. That how you did it, Sam, or did it come on naturally?"

Weaver only lay glaring at him with more fear than hate in his eyes; his great mustache seemed to tremble like a rabbit's. Only by that synthetic courage given by marijuana could the killer have screwed up his nerve enough to do the things he wanted to do.

"Say!" grunted the sheriff. "When he was in the death cell, Doctor Braunstein was in the next one to him—you remember; the fellow that murdered his wife to marry the French girl. He might have told him something."

"That's probably what happened," Steve agreed. "By the way, did you find out anything about Jerry Endicott?"

"Yes, I did. He was the Yuma Kid's uncle—his mother's brother. He inherited the place when the Kid was thought dead, and found it in such bad shape that he had to sell his ranch in Texas and put the money into it. The trials and appeals had broke the outfit. Then, I suppose, the Kid showed up and claimed at least half—and began to steal the cattle, begrudging poor Endicott his half."

IT was not until afterward that they found out the rest of the story: the Yuma Kid, with pathetic promises to reform, had persuaded his uncle to shield him. But the constant rustling and several killings had aroused little Jerry's suspicions until he threatened to expose his partner in the ranch. It was then, perhaps merely stalling for time, that Weaver had sent for the detective to "clear his name." He had, of course, no notion of his being recognized, with the change he had wrought in his features and body.

"How," the young sheriff asked Steve, "did you get wise to him?"

"He said he was a sheepman, and had never worked with cattle. When he roped that steer—well, it could either have been a wild shot, or fine roping, to get that crazy loop on him. And the quick way he bulldogged him; that *could* have been only chance, too. But one happen-

ing right after the other was a little too much of an accident! That night, riding along, it all came to me. You know, it takes a mighty clever man to act as dumb as Sam did."

The sheriff looked with contempt at the quivering man on the bed. "How about some breakfast, and I'll start back with him?" he suggested.

"I'm going along, too," Steve declared. "I'm going to see personally that he gets back into the death cell. I'll dig Diego out; I think I can wake him up now. And I have to write a letter to the Edwardses at the Rafter Bar. I'll send a cowboy over with it."

It was more than a week before Steve Mallory got back to the Rafter Bar, and when he did he had another man with him, a brown-faced man in laced boots and khaki shirt whom he introduced as John Stebbins.

"Mr. Stebbins is going to look around, and make a sort of rough preliminary survey of the valley here, and the break in the rim." Steve asked.

"What for?" asked Edwards without much interest.

"A dam. Fill that break, and you can see what a lake you'd have here. Power for the mines, and lights for Clarendon. Not to speak of water to irrigate the whole big valley down there. The mining company," Steve added casually, "has made a tentative offer of a hundred thousand, if it's what I said, but of course we wouldn't think of selling at that low figure."

Stebbins, the engineer, tried to look noncommittal, but he could not quite keep his eyes from gleaming as they swept up and down the barren valley, and took in the tiny slit in the rim, so easily dammed.

"So," said Edwards slowly, "that's why Weaver was stealing our cattle and trying to ruin us, and why he murdered Ted. Anything to get us out of here, and get this place. And why he—" His eyes wandered to Clara.

"No," said Steve. "He really was in love with her; he was completely mad about her. And he'd have married her, knowing what he'd look like in another year or so! He'd been using marijuana for years, and it had got his head twisted a little."

Clara looked at Steve with wide, horror-stricken eyes.

"I . . . I always had a queer feeling around him," she told Steve. "As if I'd known him before, or as if there was something unnatural about him. But he was so kind to us. As you said in your letter, he was a good actor, and he knew that was the only way—"

"You never were in love with him?" asked Steve, and the engineer hid a smile as he caught the anxiety in his voice.

"Heavens, no!" gasped Clara. "Why, I hadn't the faintest notion of what being in love was like until—" She stopped very suddenly, coloring and biting her lip.

"I think," said Steve, "we'd better go into the living room and have a talk, Clara."

The engineer chuckled, and Sheldon Edwards smiled for the first time since his son's death. Steve had tried as hard as he could; he had used every ounce of will power in him, but he could not quite get through the door before his arm went around Clara's slender waist. And, as far as the two watching men could see, the girl had done nothing to discourage him. In fact, before the door closed on them Clara's lips were lifting to Steve's.

THE END.

Sugale and his two killers had almost escaped when suddenly Jim Starling rose to meet them.

GUN-SWIFT RETRIBUTION

BY L. P. HOLMES

SOMEWHERE around the age of forty-five a man is liable to sit down, take stock, and find out where he stands in life. Jim Starling was doing this, sitting at the scarred, rough table in a forsaken dive in the forsaken town of Adobe Wells, when Augie Sugale's rider found him and made a proposition. It was four in the afternoon, a hot, drab, blistering afternoon, when the puncher came in. Starling had been sitting at that table since two, a bottle of flat, warm beer in front of him.

The accounts which Jim Starling had mustered were pretty meager. They came to just a pair of guns, plus the ability to use them with blinding speed and ruthless accuracy. And the inevitable reputation which went with such guns and such ability. No more. Not a single iota. Unless you wanted to muster also a state of spare, rugged health.

Each time Starling added up he came to the same answer. He smiled, without much humor. The worst of it was, the future would be

just like the past. Always on the drift, always without a home, always without a single, true friend. That was what the guns did to a man. That was the brand they placed on him. Men showed you respect, not because they liked you or admired you. But because of the guns. They used you for your own ends, paid you, and went their way, glad to be shut of you.

Starling wasn't experiencing any self-pity over this. He just recognized it as a fact, and right now he was in the mood to face facts and nothing else. Every man had a right to pick his own trail. It was a free country. And if that trail led to a jump off where all the world was empty, a man shouldn't kick. He picked the trail, didn't he?

Starling drained the last of the beer and was about to call for another when those hastening hoofs came up outside. Long habit made the gunman watch the door with a certain fixed, hard alertness. That was another penalty the guns put on a man. He never knew.

The Sugale rider hesitated in the door, then came straight over to the table. "You're Jim Starling?" he asked bluntly.

"I'm Starling. So what?"

"You've heard of Augie Sugale over at Hart Mountain, maybe?"

"I've heard of him," nodded Starling.

"There's a hundred and fifty dollar-a-month job waiting for you, if you're interested," said the puncher.

Starling built a slow cigarette. Big money. That meant gun work. This wasn't a riding job he was being offered, he thought sardonically. But who was he to pick and choose? This was where the trail led. To gun jobs like this, which lesser men were afraid to do—or better men wouldn't do. This was what the guns did to a man. Starling shrugged.

"I'll take it," he said briefly. "How soon?"

"Soon as you can get there."

Starling stood up, his height accentuating the lean, rawhide spareness of him. Sharp-featured, with a stoic aloofness about his face. And a pair of gray eyes, remotely cold.

"One more question," he said. "How'd you locate me?"

The puncher was plainly relieved by his decision. "I heard up at Bellville that you'd headed this way. Fellow down the street said he'd seen you come in here."

"All right," said Starling. "I'll ride alone."

"Sure," said the cowboy hurriedly. "Sure."

Starling headed for the livery corrals to get his horse. He must be getting old, he mused, leaving as open a trail as that to follow. From now on he'd have to be more watchful than ever. For there were plenty of men along the back trail who would like to come on him unaware, get him with his back to a door or window. Another penalty the guns imposed. At first you mastered them. Then they mastered you.

HART MOUNTAIN itself was a vast lava rimrock. Below it, to the south, spread a wide, rich valley. Starling, jogging steadily up that valley, passed cattle that were fat and sleek. He crossed a cool and sparkling river, and here, along a wide spread of river meadows, passed along the fringe of a nester settlement.

They had built a school, the nesters had, raw boarded and gleaming yellow in the sun. The school was just letting out. Kids, most of them little ones, were heading for home in various directions. Little

girls with pigtails. Little boys in faded jeans. Packing lunch boxes and books. Nester kids. Turning to wave to the smiling young schoolmarm standing in the school door.

Starling passed a little group. They stared at him, big-eyed and solemn. Interested and wondering, but from a distance. Like they'd look at a caged wolf through iron bars. Fascinated, but fearful.

The Fire Iron headquarters lay close up against Hart Mountain. The sun was setting when Starling rode in to the ranch yard. There were men about the corrals. One of them, stocky, bull-shouldered, with a round, close-cropped head, and wearing bib overalls, came over.

"I'm Augie Sugale," he announced bluntly.

Starling slouched in the saddle, forearms crossed on the horn. "I'm Jim Starling," he returned, thinking all the time that Sugale had the ugliest, most piggy eyes he had ever seen in a human.

"Ah!" said Sugale. "Then Peso Hanford did locate you. And the job interests you?"

Starling shrugged. "I'm here, ain't I?"

"Light down," said Sugale. "Bunkhouse is yonder. Make yourself at home. I'll have a talk with you and Red Faraday after supper."

Starling straightened a little. "Red Faraday? He here, too?"

"Sure. Surprise you?"

Starling did not answer. He dismounted and unsaddled, then turned his bronc into a big cavvy corral. He was thinking. Red Faraday, eh? Well, he'd always wanted to meet Faraday. Not along professional lines necessarily. But just to see what the guy looked like. Heard a lot about Faraday, he had. For Faraday's trail was like his own. The gun trail. And all reports had Faraday considerably better than an average hand.

There was one man in the bunkhouse. He had just finished shaving and was stowing meager equipment away in a meager war bag. A big man, as tall as Starling and heavier in a rawboned way. A shock of flaming hair and a blunt, bony jaw. Eyes blue and with the same remote coldness that showed in Starling's.

For a long moment they stood in silence, studying each other. Then Starling walked slowly forward. "I'm Jim Starling," he said. "Sugale said you were in here, Faraday. Seems we're to ride on the same side of the river." He put out his hand.

Faraday shook it without reservation. "Sure," he said. "I got only one objection. That's Sugale himself. Some people I despise on sight. Sugale is one of 'em."

A faint grin pulled at Starling's long lips. "Strange that we should both feel the same about that. That's the devil of it for fellows like you and me, Red. We can't afford to be choosey."

"Something in what you say, all right," nodded Faraday.

They ate at the cook shack with the rest of the outfit. And felt men apart, even here. Sugale ran a hard-enough-looking crew, but they walked around the two gunmen with a certain restraint, almost a surliness.

The meal over, and with cigarettes aglow, Starling and Faraday went up to the ranchhouse and found Sugale on the porch, slumped with uncouth abandon in a rickety chair, rolling a black stogie back and forth in his mouth, making little smacking noises.

"Don't beat around the bush," he grunted. "Here it is, short and

sweet: The nesters are getting too big for their boots in this valley. Grabbing up the very heart of it, along the river meadows. One family, the Hallocks, make up the backbone of the nesters. There's three boys in the Hallock family, tough hombres. We break them up and the rest of the nesters will quit. That's the job I got you fellers here for, to smash the Hallock boys. You can start tomorrow. Use your own methods, but get results. Any questions?"

"A couple," murmured Starling. "You the only cattleman in the valley interested in moving the nesters out?"

Augie Sugale shot him a quick glance with those piggy eyes. "No. But the others ain't got the guts to do anything about it, not against the organization the Hallocks have built up among the nesters. Then there's one hombre, Rick Morgan, who runs the Barred M over west of here, who's got the fool idea of leaving the nesters alone. Says they have rights, same as anybody else. Jumpin' Jehoshaphat! Whoever heard of a flock of sod busters having rights on a cattle range? Morgan might even put up a fight for the nesters. In that case, he'll have to be pushed around some, himself."

"The rest of your outfit," said Red Faraday, "will they back any play Starling and I make?"

"Of course. If it's necessary. It shouldn't be, not from what I've heard of you two. Seems to me that Jim Starling and Red Faraday ought to be able to handle a few nesters without yelling for help."

"We ain't yelling for help, yet," said Faraday coldly. "But I don't play the complete sucker for any man, not even for a hundred and fifty a month, and found. It's got to be distinctly understood that Augie Sugale is the man behind the drive against these nesters. And that Starling and me are only helping him out."

Sugale squirmed a trifle in his chair. "Oh, sure, sure," he mumbled.

"All right," said Red. "Starling and me will look things over tomorrow."

As they sauntered back to the bunkhouse through the purple dusk, Jim Starling chuckled softly. "Good work, Red," he murmured. "I think you jabbed a pin in him, that trip."

"He's slick as grease and crooked as a bent pin," growled Red. "We don't want to forget that a minute, Jim."

THEY were up and riding early the next morning. First stop was the little town of Box Elder. Nester wagons were already pulled up in front of the general store, getting supplies. Starling and Faraday clanked into the place. Gaunt men in homespun and women in calico were in there, keeping the proprietor and his clerk on the jump. They were a cheerful lot, these nesters, as though they realized that at last they had found soil from which they could wrest a living, as though at last they had finished the weary, ceaseless quest for a worthwhile home.

A cattleman came in, a bluff, hearty, leonine-headed man. The nesters greeted him with obvious friendliness and respect. "Good morning, Mr. Morgan," one of them said. "That team of broncs you sold me—well, you wouldn't recognize them now. I can plow as straight a furrow with them as with the best pair of mules ever to come out of Missouri."

"That's fine, Sharpe," came the

rumbling answer. "That's fine. How's your neighbor, Darnell, coming?"

"Over the hump, according to the doctor. The Hallock boys been trying to get a line on who pulled that dry-gulch try, but without no luck, yet."

"Hope they run the coyote down," said Morgan with sudden grimness. "Dirty business, dry-gulching."

Starling and Faraday went outside, pausing under the overhang to light cigarettes.

"What have we let ourselves in for, Jim?" Red growled. "There's a smell to this job I don't like."

Starling knew what he meant. It was one thing to lay the pressure of a gun on some tough, hard-bitten cattle outfit. It was something else to rawhide peaceful men with women and kids. Kids like those he'd seen leaving that school the day before. Little girls with pigtails. Little boys in faded jeans and bare, brown feet. Big-eyed little tykes, waving to their schoolmarm.

A heavy step made them both turn. The cattleman, Rick Morgan, was facing them, his big jaw set, his deep-set eyes frowning and stern. "Correct me if I'm wrong," he said harshly. "You're Jim Starling and Red Faraday. I'm Rick Morgan. I heard that Sugale was rounding up fellows like you to do his dirty work. Well, it won't go."

The gunmen looked Morgan up and down. "You got us tabbed right, Morgan," Jim Starling said softly. "But what did you mean by that last?"

"Simply that you'll keep your health longer if you decide you don't want a job with the Fire Iron."

"We don't scare worth a nickel," drawled Faraday. "You ought to realize that, Morgan."

"I know that," nodded Morgan. "That's the devil of it. You got that crazy sort of deadly pride that won't let you back down. But somewhere along the trail your kind always runs against a set of cards you can't win with. You'll get those kind of cards here, if you try and go through with this deal."

"Meaning you're backing the nesters?" said Red.

"Meaning just that. I got an outfit big enough to make itself heard, too."

"Maybe," said Red. "But we still don't scare."

Morgan turned on his heel and walked off. Starling and Faraday got their broncs and rode out of town, heading for the nester settlement down along the river.

"It's dirty business, Jim," said Red explosively. "And before it's done with I'm going to feel like I'd been smeared with slime. But we've agreed to take Sugale's money to do a job. That's about all there is to it."

Starling nodded. Again he knew how his companion felt. "We'll see this Hallock crowd and give 'em fair warning," he said.

The Hallock cabin was one of those close to the river. In a nearby field a young nester was plowing. At a portable forge back of the cabin two other young men were engaged in sharpening a plow share. At the approach of the two gunmen one of these slipped quickly into the cabin. The other stood his ground, facing them with a certain grim courage. Starling, looking around, saw that the young man at the plow had stopped in the middle of a furrow and now stood at the head of his team, a rifle across his arm.

"This the Hallock place?" asked Red.

The young fellow at the forge nodded. "This is it. Why?"

"Hear you Hallocks wield a lot of influence with this nester settlement. Tell 'em to pull out, all of 'em, you included. You'll all keep your health if you do. Otherwise—" Red shrugged.

"No!" came the harsh retort. "We stick. Go back and tell that range hog of a Sugale that, will you."

"Some things you can't buck, friend," drawled Jim Starling. He touched his guns suggestively.

"Maybe," rapped the young fellow. "You could get me cold, right now. But you'd never get off this place alive. Take a look out in the field—and at the back window of the cabin. Try and draw against those two aces."

Starling and Faraday were well aware of those two rifles. "We'd be fools not to pick our own time and place," Starling murmured to his companion.

"Like the rest of Sugale's drygulchers," sneered young Hallock. "You'd be Faraday and Starling, of course. We heard Sugale was bringing you in. Well, we still don't scare. Takes more than a pair of dirty gun coyotes, selling their dirty guns for dirtier money to whip us. Take that back to Sugale and tell him Bert Hallock said it."

"You got a salty streak in you," admitted Starling gravely. "But just salt ain't always enough. We came to deliver a warning. Next time we'll deliver something more permanent. Come on, Red."

They rode away, pausing finally at the river, letting their broncs drink. Red was scowling savagely. "We've sunk a long way, Starling," he exploded, "to take a job like this."

Jim Starling did not answer. Once more his thoughts coincided exactly with Red's.

AUGIE SUGALE was waiting for them at the corrals. "Well?" he demanded peremptorily.

"We looked things over," said Red, his voice brusque.

"I ain't paying you to look things over," reminded Sugale. "I'm paying you for action."

Red fixed his cold blue eyes on the cattleman with an intentness which made Sugale squirm. "You're liable to get a bellyful of action, Sugale—when things do bust loose. Until that time, don't go to prodding us. Jim and me don't like to be prodded."

"Oh, sure," said Sugale quickly. "Sure."

Starling and Faraday lounged in the bunkhouse, alone. A driving restlessness was burning in Starling, a restlessness which made him get up and pace the floor.

"Red," he said, "the day of our kind is just about over with. Time was when we could sign up with an outfit, knowing that the outfit we were to war against had others like us on their pay roll. It was a pretty even game, wolf against wolf. A man could see it through and still keep his self-respect. But a setup like this—hell! I got a bad taste in my mouth already." He spat emphatically.

Red Faraday nodded. "I grabbed at the job because I was flat broke," he admitted. "Nobody wants our kind for a plain riding job, Jim."

"I had less than ten pesos in my jeans when they hit me up," nodded Starling. "And a man has to live, Red."

"A mighty poor living when it's at the expense of women and kids," Red growled. "Those Hallocks. Game, decent youngsters. Grubbing a living the hard way, out of the soil. An honest living, too.

They're better men than we are, Jim."

The sudden pound of fast-traveling hoofs made Jim Starling pause at a window. He wiped away some of the dust and cobwebs for better vision, and saw a fast-traveling rider swing to a halt at the corrals. It was Peso Hanford, the puncher who had contacted him in Adobe Wells. There was an urgent excitement in the fellow's actions as he dismounted and turned to say something to Augie Sugale, who came out of a feed shed. The two talked for a moment, then Hanford hurriedly unsaddled. He had a scabbarded rifle slung to his saddle, and this, after hanging his saddle over the pole, he unslung and carried into the feed shed. Then he came out, built a cigarette and lounged against the corral fence, talking to Sugale.

Jim Starling and Red Faraday had the grub shack almost to themselves at dinner. When they had finished eating they went back to the bunkhouse to kill more time in a morose, doubting silence. Hanford had disappeared and Sugale was the only other one around. Once he came up, looked in the bunkhouse, then went away again.

TOWARD midafternoon another rider came spurring in. Starling, in some surprise, recognized Rick Morgan. The rancher came right up to the bunkhouse and stepped in. There was a cold fury in his eyes.

"Which one of you two murdering gun wolves did it?" he rapped.

The two gunmen watched him warily. "Did what?" asked Starling.

"Dry-gulched old Pete Collins."

"Neither of us," Starling said flatly. "We don't dry-gulch, Morgan. When we go after a man we meet him face to face. Besides, we don't even know this Pete Collins."

"He's a nester—he *was* a nester," said Morgan slowly, his grim, probing glance never wavering. "He was dry-gulched around ten o'clock this morning. Some hound, hiding in the river willows, cut him down with a long-range rifle shot. I understand you two were at the Hallock place around nine, making threats."

"We were at the Hallock place," admitted Starling. "But we dry-gulched no man. I tell you, we don't play the game that way, Morgan."

Augie Sugale had come softly in behind Morgan. "What's biting you now, Rick?" he asked suavely.

Morgan whirled on him. "Dirty, low-down murder, Sugale, that's what. Some one of these wolves you got riding for you dry-gulched old Pete Collins this morning while he was out working in his field. And something is going to be done about it."

"Why pick on the Fire Iron outfit?" asked Sugale smoothly. "After all, there's other outfits in this valley that have no more use for nesters than we have."

"Sugale," Morgan rasped, "you're a lying, crooked, lowdown dog—and headed for the same end. Get out of my way!"

Morgan's right arm, rigid as a bar of steel, struck Sugale across the chest, driving him staggering to one side. Then the rancher was out and gone.

Augie Sugale was cursing poisonously as he watched Morgan ride away. Then he whirled on Starling and Faraday. "What the devil do you think I hired you hombres for?" he snarled. "You had plenty of cause right then to go after Morgan. Why didn't you?"

Jim Starling grinned sardonically. "You're no infant, Sugale. Why didn't you go after him yourself? Not

crippled, are you? Or maybe you're just plain afraid to?"

Sugale went into another fit of cursing, glaring at them. Then he turned and stamped out. Red Faraday laughed softly. "The first minute I've enjoyed myself since I hit this blasted ranch, Jim," he said.

"Peso Hanford did that dry-gulching, Red—sure as you're alive," said Starling. "Remember how he came in just before noon all in a lather and hid his rifle out in the feed shed. Things are building up, and we want to keep our eyes open. Sugale might be aiming to use you and me for whipping boys. Blame a lobo for everything, you know."

"Sugale tries to double-cross us and I shoot him to rags," promised Red fiercely.

"Keep your shirt on," Starling recommended. "This thing is coming to a head. Let's wait and watch."

A TENSE, ugly strain hovered over the Fire Iron bunkhouse that night. Jim Starling and Red Faraday felt even more like outsiders than they had the night before. Peso Hanford was there, curled up on his bunk, alert, wary, nervous.

About eight o'clock Augie Sugale came in with another rider. The cowman's piggy eyes were glinting with excitement. "We've got the break we been waiting for," he announced exultantly. "Ever since those doggoned nesters hit this valley I been waiting for a chance to get all the men folks together where we could really work on them. And now the break is here. They're holding a mass meeting in the schoolhouse tonight, to organize solid against us, I reckon. I figured that dry-gulching of one here and there would get 'em stirred up finally. I figured—" He broke off in some confusion, flashing a wary glance at Starling and Faraday. "Anyway, they're holding that meeting in the school. We're going to attend—as uninvited guests. And we'll put a crimp in them that'll take all the fight out of 'em. After tonight, them that's left will discourage easy. Saddle up, all of you. And fill all the loops of your gun belts. We'll never get another chance like this."

There was an immediate bustle of preparation. Jim Starling and Red Faraday went along with the rest. And with Sugale leading, the group of horsemen rode away down valley, toward that little, raw-boarded school beside the river. At Sugale's order, one of the punchers spurred on ahead.

Jim Starling rode with his thoughts. Disturbing thoughts. Thoughts which reached back across many years, pricked here and there with highlights of terrible combat, when guns had snarled and men had died. But never as they were slated to die this night, caught like rats in a trap, cooped in that bleak little schoolhouse, with those thin walls through which a venomous slug could crunch with ease and kill some helpless devil beyond. That schoolhouse was small. It would be jammed to the door. A slug, smashing through, could hardly help but find a billet in living flesh.

Not men meeting to plan his destruction. But meeting to work out some kind of defense against that lowest of all living creatures, the prowling, sneaking, cowardly dry-gulcher. Like Peso Hanford. Not men like himself, hard and bitter men, schooled in long years of gun work, meeting in the open, asking no odds, giving none. This wouldn't be battle. This would be murder—massacre. And suddenly Jim

Starling knew he wanted and would have no part in it. To hell with Sugale and his big wages. Even a gunman, a professional at it, could own to self-respect, could have a conscience. Money couldn't buy such things. They were above all other values.

Sugale called a sudden halt. "We'll wait here a spell," he announced. "While Peso scouts things out a bit. We don't want to ride into a trap."

Jim Starling pulled a little to one side and found Red Faraday beside him. From where they sat their saddles they could look down across the river meadows. Like scattered fireflies the lights in the nester cabins gleamed. Cabins sheltering women and kids, waiting for their men who would be gathered in that death trap of a school. Men who wouldn't come home to their families any more.

Red Faraday made a queer, strangled sound in his throat. "I'm not going through with it, Jim," he murmured, his voice reaching Starling's ears alone. "I'm going to do something to stop it. So help me, I am."

"That makes two of us, Red," answered Starling. "Strange how you and me think alike. This thing can't go over. If we have to, we make a stand all alone against the whole blasted Fire Iron outfit."

"Right!" murmured Red. "Right, all the way."

In the darkness their hands met and clasped.

Peso Hanford came back. "Ain't got a single guard out," he announced exultantly. "Not a one."

"Good!" spat Sugale. "We make a surround. Peso, you and Stud Tomlin get around where you can cover the door. Plug that door with lead when any of 'em make a try at breaking into the clear. Starling, you and Faraday take the far side of the school. Slide Custer and Jim Greer cover the east end. Shorty Pyne and Bosco Hilliker will stay on this side with me. I'll give you twenty minutes to get into position. I'll give the signal to start, two quick shots. Don't anybody make a break until then. And when you start, keep yore lead low. They'll be lying on the floor. We don't want to make a slip-up on this. We can't afford to. We'll never get another chance like it. All set?"

"One thing, boss," said Hanford. "While I was making that scout I'm mortal sure I saw Rick Morgan go into that school."

Augie Sugale cursed savagely. "He would!" he spat. "He's been soft about those nesters from the first. Well, him being there ain't changing my plans one bit. If he

MAD

When a cough, due to a cold, drives you mad, Smith Brothers Cough Drops usually give soothing, pleasant relief. Black or Menthol—5¢.

Smith Bros. Cough Drops are the only drops containing VITAMIN A

Vitamin A (Carotene) raises the resistance of mucous membranes of nose and throat to cold infections, when lack of resistance is due to Vitamin A deficiency.

stops a slug it's all right with me. All right. Get going!"

The group of riders split up, fading into the blackness of the night, holding their broncs to a walk. Jim Starling swung his mount after Peso Hanford and Stud Tomlin, and Red Faraday dropped in beside him. The swing was wide, breaking out into the meadows. To their left the lights in the school appeared, but the building was too far away as yet, and the night too thick to make out any detail beyond the lights.

JIM STARLING'S mind was racing. Peso Hanford and Stud Tomlin loomed dim, mounted bulks some twenty yards ahead. Starling leaned over, touched Red Faraday on the arm. To Red's instantly alert ears Starling's voice came faint as a whisper of night wind.

"Those two ahead. We got to get 'em—quietly."

Red heard and understood. He nodded vehemently. "All right," he whispered back. "I follow your lead, Jim."

Peso Hanford and Stud Tomlin reined in, letting Starling and Faraday come up to them. "We stop here," growled Hanford. "You two go on around and as soon as the shootin' starts, close in."

"Sure," said Starling. "Sure." And with the words he whipped out a gun and smashed Hanford over the head with it. The rider grunted and poured limply from his saddle.

Stud Tomlin, too dazed with surprise to yell, automatically swung his horse away from Starling, clawing for a gun. The maneuver brought him within easy reach of Red Faraday, and the latter's gun rose and fell with the same precision and force as had Starling's. Tomlin joined Hanford on the ground.

"Get their broncs, Red," ordered Starling. "I'll take care of these two."

By the time Red brought in the two startled horses, Starling had the unconscious Hanford and Tomlin firmly trussed with pigging strings and soundly gagged with their own neckerchiefs.

"Find a place to tie those broncs, Red," said Starling. "We'll leave 'em right here. We got to work fast."

"What's the next move, Jim?" asked Red.

"We'll have to get those poor devils out of that schoolhouse."

They headed for the school. Fifty yards distant, Starling handed Red his reins and dismounted. "Wait here for me, Red."

On foot, Starling hurried to the schoolhouse door. He knew that Sugale and the rest of the Fire Iron crowd were too far away to recognize him surely in the half glow before the door. To them he would be just a flicker of movement entering the door, to be guessed as a late arrival from one of the nester cabins.

Starling stepped into the school. It was already crowded. The first individual he recognized was Rick Morgan. A growl of anger ran through the room at sight of the newcomer.

"There's one of that back-shootin' Fire Iron layout now. What's he doing here? Throw him out!"

Jim Starling's voice rang sharp. "Hold it, everybody. And listen. Sugale is pulling a surround on this school. He aims to shoot it and everybody in it, to rags. You got to get out of here, and do it quick. You ain't got much time."

One of the Hallock boys spoke up. "And move into a trap, eh? Nothing doing. We don't fool that easy."

"You're in a trap now, you stubborn fool," shot back Starling. "I'm

showing you a way to get out."

A chorus of jeering unbelief began to rise, but Rick Morgan, who had been watching Starling closely, raised a commanding arm. "Shut up! Quiet, everybody. Let me talk to him."

Morgan whirled, staring into Starling's remote eyes. "Why the change of heart, Starling?" he demanded harshly. "Selling your guns is your regular line of business, ain't it?"

"Yeah," nodded Starling. "But Red Faraday and me, we ain't drygulchers and we don't tie in with drygulchers. We'll fight hell with the sparks flying in a fair, up-and-down brawl. But we don't stand for murder and massacre. And that's what this will be if you don't move this crowd of fools out of here. Me and Red changed our minds about riding with the Fire Iron about half an hour ago. You can believe that or not, as you danged please."

Morgan turned to the listening nesters. "I believe him," he said simply. "We better follow his advice."

"Then swing that door half shut, so's to blur the light, and sneak out, one at a time, keeping low," Starling ordered swiftly. "Gather straight away from the door about fifty yards. Red Faraday is out there, with his and my broncs. Hurry up!"

WITH Morgan backing Jim Starling, the nesters argued no longer. Following directions, they began slipping out.

"Leave the lights burning," warned Starling. "We want to keep the hook baited for Sugale. And once you're outside, keep quiet."

It did not take long to empty the school. Starling and Morgan were the last to leave. They found the nesters gathered about Red Faraday and the broncs.

"What now?" asked one of the Hallock boys.

"You can suit yoreselves," answered Starling. "But if I was in yore boots, I'd take them who have guns and pull a little surprise surround myself. Make no mistake about this. It's got to be you or Sugale in this valley. Either you leave or he does. He intended to finish it all tonight. You still got the chance to take the play away from him. But you got to think and act fast."

"For my part," growled a nester, "I favor hitting Sugale now, like Starling says."

"Fair enough," said the eldest Hallock. "We'll go you, Starling."

"O. K.," nodded Starling. "Let 'em start shooting and closing in. Then, get around 'em and work 'em over. You'll have 'em in a pocket. Shoot at their gun flashes."

Five slow minutes of tense waiting went by. Then, through the night cut two quick shots. Right after, the night split wide open to blazing gunfire.

The nesters scattered swiftly into the darkness. "Let's get into it, Jim," called Red Faraday. "I'm going to enjoy this."

Starling and Faraday cut back to the north, to be in the line of the Fire Iron's retreat. They found Rick Morgan riding with them.

At first Starling could tell that all the shooting was being done by Sugale and his men. Then Sugale's voice sounded a yell of alarm. The cattleman had realized that there was no shooting coming from the front or the far side of the school where Peso Hanford, Stud Tomlin, and Starling and Faraday were supposed to be. Sugale was trying to call the remainder of his riders back.

But before he could succeed the nesters started in.

Thinly through the rap and rattle of reports came the yells of savagely angry nesters. Outnumbering the Fire Iron and with real surprise on their side, they soon had Sugale, and his men stampeding wildly. Men began to die out there in the flame-shot darkness and they weren't nesters.

A pound of hoofs came racing straight toward Starling and his two companions. Somebody was cursing savagely, venomously. Augie Sagle. Then there was the dim, rushing shape of horsemen. Rick Morgan was startled when Jim Starling and Red Faraday went into action with explosive suddenness. A horse went down, and when the other two spun wildly away, their saddles were empty.

Starling dismounted, prowled a bit, lit a couple of matches. Down around the school the shooting had stopped. The excited and exultant voices of nesters sounded.

"Well, Jim?" asked Faraday.

"Sugale and the two he elected to stay with him," was the quiet reply. "We can tell Morgan where to find Peso Hanford and Stud Tomlin, and then be on our way. Incidentally, Morgan—I'm mortal sure that Hanford pulled that last dry-gulching. A little sweating will make him talk. Ready to ride, Red?"

"Wait a minute . . . wait a minute," called Morgan. "Where you two going?"

"Down the trail—to somewhere," answered Starling bleakly. "It doesn't matter—much."

"But it does," cut in Morgan swiftly. "Let me ask you something. Ever hear of Trigger Jack Morgan?"

"Holy smokes, yes!" exclaimed Red Faraday. "Now there was a real wolf with a gun."

"Exactly," said Rick Morgan grimly. "He was my elder brother. A wolf with a gun, and he died like a wolf—alone. He wrote me a letter before he died. He said he'd tried to get away from the guns—get a regular riding job. But nobody would take him on, give him a chance. If they had, he might be living today, holding down a sane, respectable job with a sane, sound outfit. I can use you two fellows on my crew. Not for your guns. But to ride and rope and brand, just like regular hands. A chance that my brother Jack never had. The people in this valley know you for your real worth, now. You'll fit in, and no questions asked. How about it?"

They were still, thinking. These two gun fighters—Jim Starling, Red Faraday.

"I've often wondered how it would be to walk out from under the weight of these guns," murmured Starling. "I've sort of wished I might, more than once. How about it, Red?"

"I used to be a top hand, once," Red admitted. "I might be a little rusty at first, but I reckon I could learn to handle a rope again. It would seem pretty good, Jim, I think."

"That settles it," said Starling. "You've hired a pair of hands, Morgan. Let's go collect Hanford and Tomlin. Established law and order can work on them."

Down along the valley meadows lights flickered and glowed. Women and kids down there, waiting for husbands and fathers who would come home. It was good to realize that. It was very good. Jim Starling drew a deep, long breath. He knew a strange restfulness of soul. A deep and abiding peace.

THE END.

DEPUTY'S DUTY

BY S. OMAR BARKER

OUTSIDE of Sheriff Cooper's office three tall, rugged horses stood saddled and ready. Inside, three tall rugged men sat watching a plain, round-faced, nickel-plated alarm clock that hung on a nail driven in the plank wall. Its hour hand stood at nine, but its minute hand still pointed upward at a slight leftward slant.

"Well, he ain't here, Spike," Sheriff Cooper remarked, raising grizzly gray brows toward the clock.

"Seems to me like I told you he wouldn't be," said one of the two younger men dryly.

"Yeah," grunted Spike Mallory, "you told us, Tex. But I know Pat. If he ain't comin' he'll send me word. It ain't nine yet, anyhow."

Spike Mallory's voice sounded confident, but anxiety sat plain on his lean, blond face.

"Four minutes." Sheriff Cooper's new deputy—and nephew—from Texas shrugged, got up and started toward the catch-all table in the corner where he had tossed his hat. "Writin' him a letter is the devil of a way to bring in a murderer anyhow—an' a dang Mexkin at that. Let's git goin', Uncle Jim."

"It ain't straight up nine yet," objected the sheriff.

"I don't know how it is where

Pat dodged and yelled, "Keep back, Spike! You are my friend but I'll kill you!"

you come from, Tex"—Spike Mallory's lean brown fingers quit drumming the table as he spoke—"but in New Mexico a man ain't a murderer till it's proved on him. An' as for bein' a Mexican, Patricio Cardenal is just as much of a free-born American as any of the rest of us—an' entitled to the same kind of treatment. I've known Pat ever since—"

"Yeah, you've told us." Tex Hyatt's drawl was mildly sarcastic. "Ever since they weaned him off a nanny goat. Played on the football team with him. Greatest little quarterback that ever called the signals for San Marcos high. Jest an ol' boyhood pal. So you persuade the sheriff not to go after him for this killin' till you've wrote him a letter kindly invitin' him to come in an' give hisself up. Well, look at the clock. The time's up an' he ain't here, so—"

Something came sailing in through the open window. It hit Tex Hyatt in the back with a dull thump and bounced to the floor. Without pausing to see what it was, Tex leaped to the window, barely in time to glimpse the very small brown legs of a little Mexican boy vanishing around the corner.

"Shucks!" exclaimed Sheriff Cooper in surprise. "It ain't nothin' but an apple!"

Quickly Spike Mallory stooped to pick it up. It was a big round apple, but hard and green.

"Dang busted little smart-Alecks!" growled Tex. "Throwing things through windows when they're kids—that's the kind that'll be throwin' lead when they grow up!"

The sheriff laughed at his nephew. "Kind o' edgy this mornin', ain't you, Tex?"

Spike Mallory saw that the others took it for no more than the harmless kid trick of some *muchachio* trying to show how reckless he was. But Spike, unlike either Sheriff Cooper or his newcomer nephew, had been raised in San Marcos County. He knew every inch of it. And he knew there were but two apple trees in the county that bore fruit of this big, green variety; two ancient trees shading the even more ancient *portal* of the Cardenal hacienda, twenty-odd miles to the north. Spike had played under them many a time.

THE Cardenales, long ago, had been wealthy *hidalgos*, raisers of many sheep, like the Polancos whose lands bordered theirs. But between these two Spanish families, since farther back than any living man could recall, there had flourished a bitter feud. It was said that no generation of either had ever escaped one or more killings. But the Polancos, less aristocratic, had intermarried more freely with the common native stock and had outstripped the Cardenales in numbers as well as lands, sheep, dollars and political influence. Only in the last election had the increasing number of so-called "Anglo-American" settlers in the south end of the county been able to cast enough votes to upset the Polanco political regime. This they did by electing Jim Cooper, himself a former Texan, as sheriff—the first non-Spanish sheriff San Marcos County had ever had.

Now it was the Polancos who charged Patricio Cardenal with the killing of Abelino Chabez, one of their kinsmen, at a Saturday night *baile* in the little *placita* of Encinoso.

"You got the power of the law, now," gold-toothed Narciso Polanco had put it up to the *gringo* sheriff. "You gonna breeng thees Patricio Cardenal to hang by the law, thass

O. K.—we gonna geeve you the chance. But eef you don't breeng heem, joost remember: we Polancos are many an' hot of the blood!"

"The accused will be arrested an' brought to trial, Mr. Polanco," had been Sheriff Cooper's answer. "The fact that he backed me as agin' you for sheriff won't have no bearing on that. If he's convicted an' the court says to hang him, me an' the boys will hang him. If he's acquitted, jest remember, Mr. Polanco, that there ain't no blood so hot that ways an' means cain't be found to cool it!"

Then, because he trusted Spike Mallory's understanding of these Spanish-American people more than he did his own, he had yielded reluctantly to the young deputy's request that Patricio Cardenal be given a chance to come in voluntarily and give himself up by a certain time.

"If I give him my word that he'll be protected through a fair trial, sheriff, Pat'll come in," Spike had asserted. "With that whole tribe of Polancos layin' to dry-gulch him since the killin' I wouldn't be surprised if he's hidin' out somewheres at present. Pat ain't no killer at heart, sheriff, but he's Spanish, an' hot-blooded. Put a posse in there after him an' no tellin' what might happen. I know people that will get a message to him, though they wouldn't guide a posse if you cut their ears off."

Against the urging of his other deputy, Tex Hyatt, Sheriff Cooper had consented to try it. But now the time allowed to Patricio Cardenal for surrender was up, and he wasn't here.

Spike turned the big green apple slowly in his hand. Staring at it, he read a series of numbers pin-pricked in its skin: "45—72—18—90." He frowned, then casually slipped the apple into a pocket.

"Sheriff," he said, "you tried my plan an' it didn't work. That kind o' puts it up to me to go fetch him—an' I'd like to do it alone."

Tex Hyatt let out a snort.

"While I set here polishin' my pants? Jumpin' Jehoshaphat, Uncle Jim, ever since I hired on for this job I ain't done nothin' but sweep out an' play checkers. Here's prospect for a little ridin'—maybe some good ol' gun shootin' along with it—an' by gravy, I ain't goin' to stay home while—"

"Spike," said the sheriff gravely, ignoring his nephew's outburst, "if I didn't know better, I'd say you was tryin' to figger some way to let Cardenal out o' this."

"Maybe I'd like to," Spike spoke quietly. "But if I go after Pat I'll bring him in—alive, I hope, but I'll bring him." He turned to Tex Hyatt. "There's right smart back of all this you don't savvy, Tex. I mean besides my friendship with Pat. If Patricio Cardenal killed this bird, accordin' to his lights he had good reasons. It's an old family feud. Pat's own grandpappy was plugged by a Polanco when Pat was a baby. There's kind o' a code of vengeance amongst these Spanish-American folks—kind o' a matter of honor, outside an' above the law, though Pat's more like us *gringos*. Many's the time he's told me he didn't aim to carry on the feud. But it's in his blood. Things may have come up where he figgered he couldn't hold up his head if he didn't show the Polancos where he stood. He's proud, an' he's—"

"He's wanted for murder!" broke in Tex Hyatt, starting for the door. "Let's go git him, Uncle Jim!"

"Sheriff"—Spike's thin lips tight-

ened—"that apple wasn't no accident."

"You mean somebody—"

"I mean it was a message from Pat Cardenal—an' meant for me."

Sheriff Cooper's hesitation now was brief.

"Main reason I hired you for a deputy, Spike," he said, "was because I figgered I'd need somebody that savvies these Spanish folks better'n I do. I'd be a fool not to take advantage of it. Tex"—he turned to his nephew—"git out the checkers. Spike's ridin' alone."

OUTSIDE the sheriff's office two saddled horses remained. On the third, a jug-headed, freckle-nosed gray, Deputy Sheriff Spike Mallory rode northward. He traveled light of pack, but heavy of heart. It was past noon when the thick-chested gray's jog brought him to the crest of a hill whence he could look down, over scrub-oak ridges patched with fields and pastures, into the foothill village of Encinoso. Northwestward from it a couple of miles he could glimpse the green of great cottonwoods and the gnarled old apple trees that marked the Cardenal hacienda.

Northeastward, at a similar angle, lay the helter-skelter of brown adobe buildings that made up the ranch headquarters of Don Narciso, head of the Polanco clan. Between them, but still farther north, rose the jumbled, reddish-white, timber-spotted cliffs, dikes, peaks and rugged ridges of Los Peñascos Perdidos—the Lost Cliffs.

As a boy, when he had come to spend part of the summer vacation at the hospitable home of the Cardenales, Spike and Patricio had spent days exploring Los Perdidos. Somewhere deep in their midst they had discovered a green little spring-fed pocket hardly more than a hundred feet across. Many times, by a devious route carefully mapped in their minds, they had returned there to camp overnight under the green spot's one clump of spruces. "Ojito Escondido"—"Hidden Spring"—they called it, but only to each other. Following the romantic code of adventurous youngsters the world over, they had made this hide-out a secret between them. So far as they knew, nobody else had ever visited it.

"When those thieving Polancos have stolen all our sheep and we Cardenales get so poor that I'll have to rob the bank," Patricio had once said: "Here's where I'll come to hide the loot!"

"An' here's where I'll come to nab you, too," Spike had drawled back at him. "I won't stand for no bank robbin' when I get to be sheriff, *guapo!*"

Pat's answer to that had been a typical Spanish shrug.

"But if I am a friend of the sheriff, maybe that's different, eh?"

Joking, of course, as kids will, and all forgotten as they grew up to high-school age and became absorbed in football, gals and algebra—in the order named.

But now, to the grim-faced young deputy, it was no longer forgotten—and no longer a joke. A man had been killed, Pat Cardenal accused of murder, and on Spike Mallory's buckskin jacket rode the star of the law. If Pat were not to be found at the hacienda, if he had chosen, as Spike suspected, to hide out to avoid further clash with the Polancos, then Spike thought he knew where to find him.

Nevertheless, first he had better ride by the hacienda. Pat's mother, sister and younger brother might be there, perhaps with news for him. These were all that remained of the

immediate Cardenal family. Don Ignacio, Pat's father, had been found dragged to death by his horse about a year ago, his left boot with its big Spanish spur hung in the stirrup, his body mangled, his skull crushed in, apparently by a kick of his frightened horse.

Spike reined his gray out of the main road that led to Encinoso, following a little-used trail that would take him directly to the Cardenal hacienda without approaching the village. He had not gone a dozen yards when his sudden jerk on the reins brought the gray to an abrupt stop. From the *placita*, made faint by distance, came a high, weird wailing. As Spike quickly fished a pair of battered field glasses from inside his shirt, the high chant was drowned out by shouts and the thuddy banging of a dozen six-gun shots.

Through the glasses he saw a procession of mounted men deploy into the little Encinoso *plaza*. High on a pole one of them bore what looked like the limp body of a man, into which other riders were firing a hail of bullets. For the tenth of a second it flashed through the deputy's mind that the body was that of Patricio Cardenal. But even as he whirled his horse to head back for the village road, reason told him that no such weight could be carried aloft like that on a slanting pole. Another look through the glasses reassured him that the figure was a dummy.

He remembered then what Pat had once told him about an ancient custom among his people, rarely resorted to, by which a mob was sometimes incited to man hunt and bloodshed. " 'Baile de venganza'—sort of a "pep meeting for vengeance"—Pat had called it.

With a dig of the spurs Spike whirled the gray again and took out at a gallop for the Cardenal hacienda. Only squat, bow-legged old Pepe, the family peon, was there.

Señora Cardenal, her daughter and younger son, the old man said, had been a month in Albuquerque at the home of her kin, having gone there some time before the shooting of that dog cousin of the Polancos, Abelino Chavez. When Spike asked for Don Patricio, Pepe shrugged.

"The hawk with strong wings flies where he chooses," he said politely. "He is not here."

"In the village," Spike told him in Spanish, "the Polancos hold a rally of vengeance. It is important that I reach Don Patricio ahead of them. If you know where he is—"

"I have told you," old Pepe broke in. "He is not here."

"In Los Perdidos?" Spike lifted his chin northward toward the Lost Cliffs.

Pepe shrugged again.

"He is not here," he repeated.

SPIKE MALLORY squeezed himself carefully along the narrow crevice down the bottom of which dribbled the seepage from Ojito Escondido. He had left his horse in a spruce thicket more than a mile back. Here sheer cliffs rose like walls around him. Ahead, no more than a few yards more, lay the little green meadow of the Hidden Spring. Nosing around the last shoulder of the crevice, Spike could see a slicker and blanket rolled up under the clump of big spruces, and nearby the dead ashes of a recent fire.

"Pat!" Spike called softly. There was no answer.

He came on out into the open, trying to appear casual, but alert in every muscle. Friend or not, he was an officer of the law, and Patricio Cardenal was a wanted man.

Slowly he approached the spruces, but there was nobody there. He felt a sudden fear—fear that the performance he had seen in the *placita* of Encinoso might not have been mere play-acting with a dummy. If Pat was not here, then maybe the Polancos had him already.

"81—36—27—90!" The voice of Pat Cardenal spoke good-humoredly from directly over his head, but when he looked up Spike could see nothing through the thick interlace of bluish-needled branches.

"Wrong signals, Pat!" he called. "I'm carryin' the ball this time! Come down!"

Lithe and catlike, a slim, brown-skinned young man came swinging down from branch to branch. Through the sparse black stubble of three-day-old whiskers showed a grin.

"Hello, Spike," said Pat Cardenal. "Why don't you pull your gun? Don't you know I'm a desperate hombre?"

"You ain't so tough, I reckon," the deputy smiled as his friend dropped to the ground. "But hoddang it, Pat, why didn't you come in like I wrote you? After all, it's the only way you can ever—"

The surprise and swiftness of the other's next movement caught Spike Mallory wholly unprepared. Before he could realize what was happening, Pat's sudden reach had lifted the deputy's six-gun from its holster. Instinctively, as the other leaped back, Spike Mallory swung his fist. The blow took Pat Cardenal alongside the head and knocked him sprawling, but in a flash he was up again, Spike's pistol still in his hand, his own in its holster.

"Spike! Keep back!" Pat's voice, as he backed away from the deputy's deliberate advance, was pleading, but something like defiance flashed in the blackness of his eyes.

"By the holy snakes!" Spike broke in. "I believe you'd do it, Pat!"

Patricio Cardenal's shrug was expressive.

"You are an officer of the law, Spike," he said, "and I have killed a man. I do not blame you for coming here to arrest me—it was your duty. But what I have to deal with is outside the law. It is a matter of honor, and I do not intend to be arrested—by you or anybody else—yet."

"Yet? Now or later, what's the difference?"

"I am a Cardenal!" Pat drew himself up proudly. "I have a job to do."

"Another killin', Pat? Listen, you lunkhead! From the looks of what I saw in Encinose as I came past, the Polancos are figgerin' on some such of a job their ownselves, an' they outnumber you, twenty to one! Come with me an' you'll get a fair trial. Chavez was totin' a gun when he was shot, wasn't he? Plead self-defense an' you've got a mighty good chance to be acquitted. Play it your way, an' if the Polancos don't get you, the law still will, sooner or later. Much as I hate it, as long as I'm wearin' a star, I'll aim to tend to that myself."

Again the slender Mexican shrugged.

"I'm carrying the ball on this play, Spike," he said. "And I'm not asking you nor anybody else to run interference for me. Give me your word that you'll ride back to town and keep out of this, and I'll give you back your gun."

Spike struck a match to the smoke he had been rolling.

"Guns grow on bushes," he pointed out dryly. "Keep it. You know I'll be back, Pat!"

He swung abruptly on his heel and strode away to the narrow crevice entry through which he had come.

From a high spruce branch where he had hung it, near his horse, Spike reached down another six-shooter. Hiding out an extra gun was a habit he had found useful before. From the scabbard on his saddle he took a short-barreled .30-30. He filled its magazine with cartridges loaded with sharp-pointed, steel-jacketed bullets. A man disabled in shoulder, leg, arm or even body by such a lead would nevertheless have a chance to live, for the wound would be clean cut, without torn flesh.

Thus armed, the young deputy started once again on the devious route to the Hidden Spring. He had given Sheriff Cooper his word to bring Pat Cardenal in, dead or alive, and he meant to do it. But to make it back to the Ojito before sundown he would have to hurry.

IT was true that there was only one way into the Ojito Escondido, and that nobody but Spike and Patricio Cardenal had ever gone to the trouble of finding it. But access to the top of the cliffy ramparts whence one could look down upon the Hidden Springs from the north was not so difficult. No horse could climb the slide-rock slopes leading up there, but sheep could, and sometimes herders followed their flocks up and up to the scattered grassy parks just back of the rim. It was by this approach, guided by one of his cousin sheepherders who had spied upon Patricio at the spring that Narciso Polanco and a dozen of his kin came swarming, stirred to action by the "pep meeting" for vengeance held in the *placita* of Encinso.

Following the shooting of Abelino Chavez, Pat Cardenal had disappeared. But to Don Narciso he had sent a message:

"This matter lies between you and me, nobody else. Meet me at sunrise tomorrow on the *Llanito* two miles east of Encinoso, and we will settle it without harm to anybody else."

"Llanito" means "Little Plain." It was a spot of open country offering no opportunity for ambush. That, perhaps, was why Don Narciso had not kept the rendezvous. Unable thus to meet the chief of the Polancos face to face, and fully aware of the danger of being dry-gulched, or arrested, if he tried to seek him out, Pat Cardenal had returned to his hide-out to bide his time.

He had hoped Spike Mallory would understand the cryptic message that old Pepe had gotten delivered for him via an apple-throwing *muchacho*, and let him make his play alone without interference from the law—at least for the time being. He had taken that means of sending word lest it fall into the hands of Sheriff Cooper or his other deputy, who would certainly not be sympathetic to any such appeal.

What Pat should have realized, but had not, was that in taking his oath as a deputy sheriff, Spike Mallory had assumed a duty and a loyalty greater than that of friendship. So Spike had come after him. Pat could not blame him for it. For the moment he had avoided arrest, but in leaving, Spike had promised to come back. The thought of bloodshed between them was more than Pat's warm-hearted nature could endure. Maybe Spike was right. Maybe he should surrender, leave the whole matter up to the law.

It was nearing sundown. Pat had finally made his decision, and was starting for the narrow exit from the

Hidden Spring meadow, when suddenly something that looked like a small bundle of yellowish sticks came hurtling down through the air. Even as Pat's eyes flashed instinctively upward toward the cliff rim, the hurtling bundle struck a low jut of ledge hardly two dozen yards ahead of him. The shock of explosion almost jarred him off his feet. Tiny pellets of stone blasted loose by the dynamite stung his cheeks, but otherwise he was unhurt. Almost instantly came a second explosion—then a third.

STILL half a mile away when this strange, thunderous cannonading and its hundreds of cliff-thrown echoes came to his ears, Spike Mallory stopped an instant to listen, then put every ounce he had into the job of traveling fast. Just what was happening he could not guess, but his ears told him where it was happening, and that was enough. He had to get there, and get there quick.

Squeezing along the last crooks of narrow crevice leading into Hidden Spring meadow, Spike found his way suddenly blocked by heaped-up debris. He paused to swipe sweat out of his eyes with his shirt sleeve, then clawed his way up over the rock pile. Everywhere the sharp brimstone tang produced by stone crashing against stone was in the air, and with it the bitter, acrid smell of exploded dynamite. From the top of this rubble pile he could look into Hidden Spring meadow. A fragment of Pat Cardenal's black hat, half buried in broken stone, lay just ahead of him.

Yonder, on the rim of the north cliff, the figure of a man appeared, hurled something out into space. As he watched it hurtle downward toward the green pocket below, Spike realized now what was happening. Having located Pat Cardenal here in this pocket, the Polancos were taking their vengeance with brutal leisure by tossing dynamite over the cliff to blast him to pieces. From that remnant of Pat's hat Spike Mallory guessed that they had succeeded.

The little bundle of dynamite he had seen hurled struck the outer branches of one of the big spruces under which Spike and Pat had camped as boys, and came bouncing gently groundward, its fuse sputtering. Spike swung up his rifle, cocked with the swing, but before he could get that man figure on the cliff in his sights, the shot of another rifle cracked out. Stone dust puffed from the cliff rim and the man leaped back.

Spike's eyes shifted toward where his ears had placed the rifle crack. There, well toward the top of the outermost spruce, straddling a swaying limb, he saw the slim figure of Pat Cardenal, his black hair wild, his face bloody, his clothing ripped and torn. He was levering another shell into his carbine. With that flash of quick deduction instinctive to the outdoorsman, Spike realized that the wind must have blown Pat's hat here, where a blast of dynamite had half covered it, and that his friend, for the moment at least, was safe.

"Pat!" he yelled. "Hold 'em, boy! I'm comin'!"

He saw the wave of Pat's arm in answer, but the sound of his reply was drowned in the roar of explosion as the short fuse fire on that last bundle of dynamite reached the cap. The tall spruces rocked as in a glade, and fragments of branches flew through the air like confetti. Spike saw Pat Cardenal sway from his perch, fall to the next round of branches, clutch at them a moment,

fall again, then finally catch himself less than a dozen feet from the ground.

Pat's hoarse shout sounded somehow faint, yet in it was the same old tone of easy, but deadly, self-assurance Spike had so often heard from his teammate on the football field:

"Por diablo, Spike! This ain't no fight of yours! Keep back, or you'll get blown to hell!"

"24—51—33—60!" yelled Spike Mallory, on sudden impulse calling the old football signal whose numbers, each pair adding to six, had meant their favorite line-crashing play together.

His swift shot at movement up on the rim punctuated his shout, and brought a yell of pain as the would-be dynamite hurler leaped back. Spike cursed those steel-jacketed cartridges now, and plowed his pockets for others, soft-nosed bullets that would tear and kill when they hit.

AS Spike started across the open toward the spruces, from over another segment of the cliff rim there came hurtling a second bundle of dynamite. Moving cautiously, with his eyes watching the rim where he had seen the first man appear, Spike did not see it. The four-stick bomb landed with a dull thud in the meadow grass almost directly ahead of him but did not explode—though its fuse still sputtered—and still Spike advanced, unaware of his danger.

"Look out, Spike!" The deputy whirled at the voice behind him. As if conjured out of thin air, over the rubble pile blocking the entrance, came Tex Hyatt.

Tex was pointing, and following the direction of his upraised arm, Spike first saw the dynamite with its sputtering fuse, almost at his feet. This he saw—and more: the slim, swift-running figure of Pat Cardenal headed straight for it. In his football days the slim Mexican quarterback had been famous for his long, diving tackles, but never had he made a prettier nor a swifter one than now, as he dived headlong for that sputtering fuse, yanked its scant remaining two inches loose from the dynamite and stomped it underfoot.

"Quick, Spike! We get to the trees! It is the only safe—"

He broke off suddenly. With the unwarned swiftness of a striking snake, he grabbed Spike's rifle out of his hand, swung it to his shoulder, aiming at a bulky something that had appeared suddenly on a high crag well around toward the east. Up there, too, the slant of lowering sun gleamed on a rifle barrel. The two shots sounded like echoes of each other, so close together were they fired.

"You hit him, Pat!" Spike saw the bulky figure lurch a little, then catch itself. "Give it to him again!"

Somehow it had not occurred to him that the other rifleman, too, might have made a hit, until he heard Pat Cardenal's voice, strangely quiet, there at his elbow:

"Better you take the gun, Spike. I can't shoot no more—now."

Whirling, Spike saw the torn, mangled mess that had been Pat Cardenal's thigh before a soft-nosed bullet had done its bloody work.

The blood-smeared brownness of the Mexican's face was the yellow white of parchment, but still he managed to stand. Spike Mallory's lips went white, too, as he seized the rifle. His aim at the bulky figure clinging to that far high crag was swift and cold and steady. In the space of a breath after the rifle crack he thought he had missed; then there was the flash of a dropped rifle, and

the thick, bulky body of Don Narciso Polanco tumbled from the cliff and came rolling down a slide rock slope.

Beside him Spike saw Hyatt lower his .30-30. The tall Texan's face was grim.

"I'd have got the dirty killer if you hadn't," Tex said bleakly, as together they turned to carry Pat Cardenal to the uncertain shelter of the spruces.

They stanched the flow of the blood the best they could, but despite their quiet words of reassurance, they knew that Patricio Cardenal was dying, and so did he.

"Better you go now . . . before they throw more dynamite!" he urged weakly. "Holy mother! Does a man need help to die? Go, before—"

LISTEN" Tex Hyatt broke in. The tense silence that had seemed to be waiting for another great explosion was broken instead by a rattle of shooting and wild, Spanish yells from up beyond the cliff rim. "That'll be Uncle Jim an' his posse, boys, an' it sounds like they're cleanin' 'em out! Look, Spike, Uncle Jim got to thinkin' it over, you bargin' up here all by yourself, an' he changed his mind. When we got wind at Encinoso of what all was up, he sent me to trail you down an' warn you, while he made up a quick little posse of Pat's friends an' took in after them Polancos. If we could jest of got in on it a little sooner—"

"Soon enough, señor," said Patricio Cardenal. His black eyes, wide with pain, but holding no hint of fear, turned to Spike Mallory. "My friend," he whispered faintly, speaking in Spanish, slowly, careful to make his waning strength last, "tell them . . . my mother, my sister, my brother Macario . . . that the feud is ended, for we Cardenales . . . now we have our vengeance! Abelino Chavez . . . he was drunk that night . . . boasting how Narciso Polanco paid him a hundred dollars to kill my father . . . and . . . and make it look like an accident. For that I killed him. For that I would not submit to the law until I had also killed Narciso Polanco. I could not . . . with honor. But now he is dead. I die. The score is evened!"

"It was your play, Pat"—the ache in Spike Mallory's throat made speech difficult—"an' you tried to call it that way. If I hadn't butted in an' fumbled it—"

"Basta!" the weak voice broke in. "It is enough that the law did not stop my friend from shooting straight when the time came! Signals . . . Spike—" Now he was becoming half delirious—"24 . . . 51 . . . 42 . . . 60. Remember . . . *amigo?*"

"I called him a dang Mexkin," said Tex Hyatt soberly. "But he had guts!"

Spike nodded.

"There was one play in football," he said, "where he used to carry the ball himself an' didn't even want anybody runnin' interference. Generally got through for a touchdown, too. The quarterback called out the signals, them days. I remember Pat's signal for that one-man play. It was any bunch of numbers where each pair added up to nine—same as was on that apple he sent me—but the law . . . well, the law ain't football."

Sadly Spike Mallory spread his hands. His long face looked gaunt.

"I promised Sheriff Cooper I'd bring him in, Tex. Maybe we better get started."

THE END.

RANGE SAVVY

by H. FREDRIC YOUNG

In the pioneer days, many an evening was spent at home casting bullets and reloading fired shells. Then, when a man stepped up and bought his Winchester, he also bought reloading tools. Primers were cheap, costing but a few cents a hundred. Black powder could also be obtained in bulk, and almost every ranchhouse stocked as much as twenty-five pounds of powder. To hand-load, the pioneers used simple bullet molds, frequently built at the end of the loading tool. Bullets were lubricated with beef tallow. Dents in spent shells were hammered out on an anvil, a horseshoe nail often being used. Several hundred cartridges could be loaded by one individual in an evening.

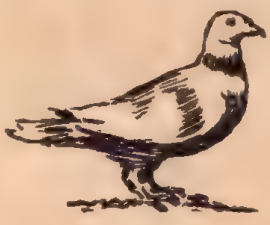
It is generally assumed that had it not been for the distractions of the Civil War coupled with the hostility of pack-train owners, camels might have yet been in our West as the common means of traversing the plains and deserts. It is true that the mule interests did steadily fight the innovation, a move given impetus under President Pierce's administration when thirty thousand dollars was appropriated to buy and ship two consignments of the beasts to Texas. But some old-timers still claim that the downfall of the camel was simply that the animal could not traverse the rocky plains without suffering badly lacerated feet.

To kill or not to kill—that is the cry of the skunk hunter. To a point, the little animals are valuable alive, but some of their vices sound their death knell.

They are valuable as exterminators of small rodents, such as the pesky field mouse, the mole, and perhaps even the gopher, and their diet also includes various beetles, bugs, and numerous other destroying insects. And, dead, you are liable to meet them in the best society, for their fur makes the finest and most durable of coats.

On the other hand, they are accused of robbing the nests of game birds and, worse, getting in the way of the passing automobile, so their overabundance is not really desirable.

Homing pigeons have long been useful to military units the world over, though until recently the birds have flown in daylight only, therefore running the hazards of hawks as well as snipers along the route. After several years of experiments at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, the signal corps developed a hardy species of pigeon which flies only at night, the first of their kind. Particularly useful in connection with military planes, they can and will fly through rain, sleet, fog and snow, and around thunderstorms. But one hazard remains for this new breed of homing pigeon, and that is the nighthawk. Luckily, these predatory birds are not numerous enough to constitute a serious menace.



Mr. Young will pay one dollar to anyone who sends him a usable item for RANGE SAVVY. Please send these items in care of Street & Smith, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Be sure to inclose a three-cent stamp for subjects which are not available.

Hep Gallegher had found another freak for the carnival if Señor Hernandez's horde of kids could get him into the buggy.

HEP AND THE DOG-FACED MAN

BY GLENN H. WICHMAN

HEP GALLEGHER and I were supposed to be hightailing it up to Utah where there was a cow job waiting for us but instead of hurrying we were drinking beer and eating tacos and chili beans in Señor José Hernandez's cantina at Bacaville. It was Gallegher's fault. That and some big paper signs that were pasted up all over town. The signs told everybody who could read English that the Great Amalgamated & Consolidated Carnival Co. was on its way to Bacaville and would get there in a couple of days.

"Work can be easily overdone," Hep had said when we rode into town and spotted the posters. "Many a man's gone to an early grave by overworkin' himself. That's something you always want to remember, George."

Then he had seen a picture of a man in pink tights going up in a hot-air balloon while swinging on a trapeze and that had settled it. I couldn't have moved him out of Bacaville unless he was unconscious and didn't know about it.

"A thing like this," Gallegher had maintained firmly, "is instructive and educational. It broadens a guy. Shucks! There's no end to what a man can't learn at a carnival. Once at a carnival I saw a gent who had turned to granite and a lady with a long beard—"

"Listen, you lug," I interrupted, "by the time these carnival slickers are through with you, you won't have a horse or a saddle an' you'll be darn lucky if you've still got your boots and your pants. You'll end up by walkin' to Utah in your bare feet. And freezin' to death on the way."

"Not me!" Gallegher had snorted. "Why I know all about the little pea and the three walnut shells!"

"There's plenty you don't know," I reminded him. "You're the great-

est sucker in the world. Why, when those slickers get through with you you won't—"

But it wasn't any use. I surrendered. And that was why we were drinking beer in the nearly deserted cantina while we were waiting for the carnival to come to town. It was still a day away and so there was a good chance that we'd drown ourselves in Señor Hernandez's beer before it got there. Or else catch ourselves on fire from the tacos, which were as hot as the hinges on an oven.

The cantina was off the main stem and down among the cottonwoods and folks who liked cold beer and hot frijoles often went there when they came to town. The señor himself was quite a sight worth looking at. He was too fat to do much except sit but fortunately he had eleven children and a señora and between them they looked after things. The adobe walls of the cantina were covered with pictures of steamships and battleships and José Hernandez, having a great fondness for steamships and battleships, would sit and look longingly at the pictures although he had never seen either a steamship or an ocean in his life. When he wasn't looking at the pictures he was having himself a nap. Which was most of the time. This was a sight worth watching. As he breathed he shook and shivered like a ton of jelly and made outlandish noises and gave the appearance of a mountain that was about to blow up.

Gallegher and I were watching Hernandez snore when the fanciest dude that either of us had ever seen in our lives came walking cautiously into the cantina. The dude was tall and thin and wore a green derby hat and a red vest and pearl-gray trousers. Stuck around in various places on him were diamonds as big as walnuts. And he was smoking a cigar that was all of half a foot long.

The dude took one look at the sleeping Mexican and then said: "Shades of P. T. Barnum! This must be Giganto, The Terrible Turk!"

"No," I said, "it's only José Hernandez, the guy who owns this joint."

"The pity of it, gentlemen," the man told us. "The pity of it. Maybe then it's Gargantua the Human Mountain."

None of this appeared to make much sense. But Gallegher didn't mind this because he was already fascinated by the guy with the red vest.

"Mister," Hep said, "I'll bet you're an actor."

"You lose," the man said quickly. "The drinks are on you."

"There's more than that going to be on you," I said to Hep. "Or off of you. Or something—"

"Just keep still," Hep interrupted. "When you meet a gentleman you might at least try and act like one."

So we went up to the counter and Señor Hernandez shoved out the glasses and a bottle of tequila with a pitcher of beer to wash it down with.

Fancy-pants was looking from one to the other of us very intently. "We'll match for the next round," he said finally. "I'll take heads—"

Even while he was speaking a silver dollar twirled in the air and came down heads. I started to pick up the dollar but he dropped it in his pocket.

"Thank you very much, gentlemen," he said. "I'm Colonel Lunsford F. Churchill of the Great Amalgamated & Consolidated Carnival Co. I'm here in Bacaville

looking for Bo-Bo, The Dog-faced Man."

Hep looked blank, and then looked over his shoulder, and then behind the counter.

"Bo-Bo, The Dog-faced Man!" Colonel Churchill repeated, and then laughed hollowly into the palm of his hand.

"We haven't seen him," I told the guy. "We don't know any dog-faced men."

Churchill jerked his thumb at Gallegher. "*You*, pal," he said, "are Bo-Bo, The Dog-faced Man!"

Now it was pretty clear that the fancy guy must be out of his head. Hep continued to look blank, as though he was trying to remember whether he was or he wasn't a dog-faced man.

Then the gent explained what he was talking about. It appeared that the carnival had lost its dog-faced man. The fellow had quit to travel around with an evangelist as a horrible example of strong drink and sinfulness.

"It's too bad," Colonel Churchill continued, "that this bozo quit because he had a swell future in the show business." The colonel looked hard at Gallegher. "You'll do fine, pal. You'll make a good dog-faced man. The make-up'll just about fit you."

"Don't," I advised Hep. "It's plumb foolish."

But before Gallegher could answer, Churchill was speaking again.

"Friend," he said to me, "you'll do all right as Ju-Ju, The Missing Link. Ju-Ju, neither man, beast, fish nor fowl—"

I didn't like this.

"Not me," I said. "Try and be sensible. Don't be so nutty. I'll punch cows for a living but I won't be a missing link for anybody!"

"What!" Churchill hollered. "And miss a chance to be an actor and see the world! To travel in the United States, Canada and Europe!"

"Come on, Hep," I urged. "Let's start off for Utah. This guy's as screwy as a bed bug. The tequila's gone to his head."

"Be an actor," Hep repeated. "Travel in Europe and Canada. Ride on trains. I've always wanted to get around on something besides a horse."

SO Hep decided, just like that, that we weren't going to punch cows any more. Colonel Lunsford F. Churchill asked us what our names were and shook hands with us as though we were his relatives.

"George," he said to me, "I believe it's your turn to buy the snorts."

Now by this time the tequila and beer had turned the world into quite a rosy place and it wasn't nearly so hard to listen to the colonel or to believe him either. I bought the next round and then Churchill, who apparently didn't have a dime of spending money about him even for all his diamonds, grew confidential.

"Boys," he said, "don't breathe a word of this to anybody, but the Great Amalgamated & Consolidated Carnival Co. is in temporary trouble. We're bivouacked on Barley Flats, which is about seven miles south of here. The chief difficulty is this: the other night most of our freaks deserted us. They either went over the hill like a lot of traitors or else got new jobs, like the guy who hired himself out to the evangelist. That's left us hung up higher than a kite. We can't open up here in Bacaville unless we can get some more freaks. That's why I've driven up here in a buggy and it's why I'm staying off the main street and more or less out of sight."

"Well," I said to him, "you've got the hot-air balloon and the trained seals and the talking horse and the ferris wheel and those sort of things that are on the posters. I can't see as you've got anything to worry about."

Colonel Churchill looked very sad at this. "I'm surprised at you, George," he told me sadly. "I'm surprised at your lack of perspirosity."

"Why certainly," Gallegher chimed in. "What would a carnival be without some freaks!"

This pleased the carnival man no end. "Gallegher," he said, "you're certainly an understanding and sympathetic guy. You're going to be a great help to me. Now you understand why when I first saw you I called you Bo-Bo, The Dog-faced Man."

"But he isn't dog-faced," I maintained. "He looks just like most anybody."

"A matter of opinion," the colonel told me."

"Nobody in their right mind," I said, "would pay two-bits to look at Hep."

"Friend," Colonel Churchill murmured, "before anybody looks at him they'll already have paid their two bits."

This worried Hep slightly, but not much.

"We'll put a costume on you," the carnival man explained. "After I'm through fixing you up your own uncle wouldn't know you."

"It'd be taking money under false pretenses," I objected. "I ain't any more a missing link than I am a horse."

"Another matter of opinion," the colonel whispered, and laughed slyly behind his hand. "You boys have to be broad-minded about this if you want to travel and see the world."

"We certainly want to see the world," Gallegher declared. "We're joinin' up with the carnival."

So that settled it. Hep was now a dog-faced man and I was a missing link by the name of Ju-Ju.

"That's swell," Churchill said. "Pretty soon we'll go down to where the carnival's bivouacked. But first I've got to get some more freaks. Two ain't enough."

I knew what Lunsford F. Churchill was going to do next, and sure enough he did. He went up to where Señor José Hernandez was snoring in the big chair. José's cheeks were going in and out like a blacksmith's bellows and his snoring sounded like a stage coach falling off a cliff. For a long minute the colonel looked at the cantina owner.

"I've got it!" Churchill exclaimed finally. "I knew I'd think of it. This is Prince Kokohulahula, Rear Admiral of the Hawaiian Navy, Only Royal Hawaiian Prince in captivity."

José Hernandez shook himself something fierce and then woke up. "Who—" he began.

"Speaka de English?" Churchill asked the Mexican.

By now José was all the way awake. "Better than you do, you fathead!" José answered. "I was born in Montana."

"No, you wasn't," the carnival man corrected. "You was born in Honolulu and your name is Prince Hilo Kokohulahula."

"Not so's you can notice," José Hernandez answered. "What's the matter anyway? Is it the tequila?"

There were still no customers in the cantina so it was perfectly safe to talk. The colonel explained the terrible fix the carnival company was in.

"I need you very badly, señor," he concluded, "to help fill up the tent.

Wouldn't you kindly consider being a Hawaiian admiral."

"José could do quite a lot about filling up the tent," I said, "but you couldn't fool anybody in these parts about him being either a Hawaiian or an admiral. He's known all around here as a chili cooker and a tortilla fryer."

"Yeah," Hernandez grunted. "I don't think I'd like to be an admiral."

But the colonel was equal to any occasion. He pointed at the pictures of the battleships and the big steamboats. "You can take these along, too," he said. "Besides that you'll have a sword and a pistol and a cocked hat with a feather in it. And you'll have chin whiskers and there won't be anything to it. Besides, I've got a boat that you can stand in while you're holding a spyglass."

"Spyglass," Hernandez repeated. "Boat. Sword. Pistol—" He grunted a time or two and tried to get up but got discouraged and gave it up.

"You can be a sitting admiral," Churchill told him. "Admirals usually sit anyway. Especially down in Honolulu. I've got a buggy that you can ride in down to Barley Flats."

"Better take a twirl at it, José," Hep suggested. "It's time you got some exercise."

"Nope," Hernandez concluded. "My wife wouldn't like it."

"Your wife wouldn't have to know," Churchill countered. "Tell her that you're going off with us to discover a gold mine. When we find it then she won't have to work anymore."

This impressed Señor Hernandez a lot. "Well," he admitted, "I'd certainly like to look through the spyglass."

ONCE more he tried to get up and this time he made it. Then he called loudly to his señora who had gone into the back room and when she came running out he explained about the gold mine. Mrs. Hernandez nodded and tapped her own forehead and went to washing glasses behind the counter. Undoubtedly she thought we were all crazy.

"It's settled, boys," José announced. "I can go. That's her way of saying so. When do we start?"

"We'll pick you up here," Churchill said. "Hold everything until we come for you."

Then he led the way out of the cantina and in among the cottonwoods.

"Are there two more quaint characters around here," he asked, "that can be trusted to join us? I could use a sword swallower and an India-rubber man."

"That's asking too much of Bacaville," I told him. "There aren't any guys like that around."

Hep and I had worked on a spread near Bacaville a couple of years before and in those days had known quite a few people.

"Lead me to somebody," Churchill compromised, "and I'll figure out as quick as you can wink your eye what they are."

"Not me," I said. "I may get myself in trouble, but I'll stop there."

Gallegher was more helpful. He scratched his head and came up with a-hard-of-hearing guy named Jim Prather who worked in a livery stable.

"Prather," Hep explained, "may not know what you're talking about but if you can get it through his head he'd do anything. He's as brave as a lion. And as deaf as a post. He's

always looking for something to do."

So we went up behind the livery stable and Hep went in and fetched out Jim Prather who was a big, good-natured fellow.

"A fire!" Prather yelled at Hep. "I don't see any fire!"

"Not a fire!" Hep hollered. "A carnival!"

Churchill led the way through the trees until we were a good two hundred yards from the street, which was as close as we dared get unless we wanted to be overheard.

Jim Prather pointed at Churchill. "What's the matter with him?" he shouted. "Where'd he get them clothes?"

Gallegher pointed at the distant mountains. Jim Prather shrugged and seemed to be satisfied.

"A guy oughta stay away from Kansas City!" he hollered. "That's no place to buy clothes!"

Colonel Lumsford F. Churchill shook his head. "I'm sorry, boys," he said, "but I can't use this fellow. I've got leather lungs. I can bark from dawn to dusk but I'm not strong enough to explain anything to Mr. Prather."

"Mebbe you're right," Hep admitted. He spoke then to the livery helper. "Go on back to work, Jim! We don't need you!"

"Why, sure I'll go!" Prather roared. "When do we start?"

"We ain't going!" I hollered.

"I'll get a horse!" Jim shrilled. "I've got a quart that a guy gave me last night for doctorin' his pinto mare!"

The mention of the bottle interested Colonel Churchill a great deal. "We'll bill you," he yelled suddenly, "as Hctah, The Man From Mars!"

"Of course it's fit to drink!" Prather hollered. "But we won't open it till we get there!"

And with that he went trotting back toward the livery stable.

"He thinks he's going to a picnic," I said. "You birds oughta be shot."

"Come to think about it," the colonel replied, "I'm very glad Mr. Prather's going to join the carnival. If any of our customers want to complain about anything I'll have them take it up with Mr. Prather. I may even make him vice president in charge of answering questions."

A couple of minutes and Jim Prather came tearing up on a big roan.

"Yip-e-e-e-e!" Jim yelled. "Let's go!"

"Hep," the colonel ordered, "please explain to him that we're looking for another freak."

Gallegher yelled until he was red in the face.

"Sure!" Jim Prather hollered. "Why didn't you say so in the first place!"

He went scooting away on his horse and in a few moments came back with half a gunny sack filled with rolled oats tied behind his saddle.

"Of course the horses want to eat!" Jim yelled. "Why didn't you say so and not beat around the bush about it!"

With that Colonel Churchill decided that he had enough freaks. Gallegher and I got our horses from the tie rack where we'd left 'em and the colonel got his driving buggy from the cottonwoods and we all met in front of José Hernandez's cantina. Some few folks had gathered to see what the excitement was about.

"We're goin' on a picnic!" Jim Prather roared.

Which was nice of him, all right, because that cleared up the mystery and people drifted away. Now came the problem of getting Señor Hernandez up into the buggy. He

made one try himself but only got one foot off the ground. It was his numerous kids that solved the difficulty. A half dozen of them got beneath their old man and all shoved at once. After much grunting and groaning they got him up in the seat.

"You eat too much!" Prather yelled at him.

"A very old joke, my friend," the señor said sadly. "I've heard it before."

Now came another difficulty. Hernandez occupied the whole seat. There wasn't even room for an infant to have sat beside him.

"I'll stand up in back," Churchill said, "and drive it like it was a Roman chariot. Hernandez, you can pretend you're the Emperor Nero." The colonel could certainly think of things. "Giddup!" he yelled to the driving horses, and away he went at the rate of about three miles an hour.

Gallegher and I and Jim Prather followed along behind.

"How about Utah?" I said to Hep. "That job ain't goin' to keep forever."

"Don't bother me," Hep came back. "I'm thinkin'."

"Say!" Jim shouted. "I wish you guys'd stop whisperin' behind my back! We're all good friends, ain't we?"

"We're all damn fools!" I told him, and that satisfied him perfectly because he thought I was complimenting him on what a fine horse he had.

Along in the late afternoon we came to Barley Flats. The carnival was camped in a hollow and out of sight from the road. There were only four wagons and not more than five gents came out to meet us. All the carnival hands appeared to be nervous and full of anxiety.

"Where's the ferris wheel?" I asked the colonel. "Where's the hot-air balloon?"

"They're folded up in the wagons," Gallegher explained. "Don't you know anything at all?"

"It's this way, boys," Churchill said. "This is only the advance guard of the carnival. The rest of it is further down the line. We travel in two sections so's not to raise to much dust."

"Certainly this is a nice place to have a picnic!" Jim Prather yelled. "I didn't say it wasn't, did I!"

"He's a nice fellow to talk to," Colonel Churchill observed.

By now Jim had cracked out his quart and Señor José Hernandez had rolled out of the buggy. The carnival crew became very enthusiastic about the bottle. But they wouldn't talk to us much. It appeared that Lunsford Churchill did the talking for the outfit. He had an endless line of stories that lasted till it was dark. Then he organized a singing society. Eight o'clock and the carnival as well as the freaks were sound asleep. At least we must have been asleep because I woke up the next morning under a wagon.

"What a swell picnic!" Jim Prather hollered, after he'd taken his head out of a pan of water. "Let's go somewhere and have another!"

Gallegher nodded and groaned.

Señor José Hernandez held his eyes open with his fingers. "Well," the señor said, "I'm glad we're here. All during the night I thought I was an airship. I was afraid I might wake up in Alaska."

Black coffee made the freaks feel better and changed the color of the sky from dark brown to deep blue.

"Now for Bacaville," Colonel Churchill announced. "Tonight we'll have our grand opening there." He spoke directly to us freaks: "Boys, I'm going to have to ask you

to ride in one of the closed wagons. It wouldn't do for the citizens of Bacaville to catch even a glimpse of you before tonight when you have your costumes on."

This appeared to be reasonable enough.

"Don't worry about your horses," Churchill added. "They'll be well taken care of."

How to explain this is Jim Prather wasn't so easy. In fact it couldn't be explained at all. He got into the big circus wagon under the impression that that was where the picnic was going to be held. When we were all inside somebody closed and locked the door from the outside. The wagon had four small windows with bars on them.

"I think we're prisoners," Hernandez said.

HE wasn't wrong. We couldn't have any more got out of that vehicle than we could have got out of a first-class hoosegow.

"There's nothin' to worry about," Hep said. "If you knew anything about carnivals you'd know that the freaks are always locked up. They wouldn't dare to let the freaks run around loose."

That appeared to be a rather idiotic way of looking at it.

"It'll be interesting," the señor observed, "to see which direction we head off in."

"Well, let's have the picnic!" Jim Prather hollered. "What are we waiting for?"

By now the carnival people were harnessing up the teams. A quarter of an hour and we were off the flat and out on the road. And for a wonder we were heading for Bacaville.

"I told you," Hep chuckled. "You gents are always imagining things. Why, this is going to be the most enjoyable thing that ever happened to us."

"I'd feel better," I told him, "if I didn't have these bars to look through. It's a bad sign."

José Hernandez quit worrying and went to sleep. I didn't know what conclusion Jim Prather came to, but he went to sleep also. The wagons rumbled along and after a couple hours or so we came to Bacaville and stopped in a clearing not far from the cantina.

"The rest of the carnival ain't got here yet," Hep said. "But it'll be along."

Through the bars I asked Colonel Lunsford F. Churchill how about getting out.

"Sure," he replied. "Just as soon as we get the tent put up over the wagon."

By now all the small kids in town were clustered around as well as all the dogs and loafers. Churchill went around talking to the small boys. One by one they went scampering off, yelling at the top of their lungs. Sheriff Deardorff showed up and wanted to know if this was all the carnival.

"By no means, my good man," the colonel told him. "They're eight more sections to follow." Then Churchill went into a lengthy story about a cowboy he'd met on the way into town who said that there'd been a murder up in Coldbrook Canyon. "In fact," Churchill concluded, "I was just about to look you up, sheriff. I promised the cowboy that I would. The body is right at the entrance to the canyon. On the left bank of the stream. That's what the cowboy said."

"Well, thanks, partner," Sheriff Deardorff said. "I'll ride right up there."

Deardorff hustled himself back to town. Then the carnival crew went

to work on the tent. Even the colonel took off his green derby and his coat and went to work, too.

Jim Prather woke up and saw that the tent was being erected. "Now that's a nice idea," Jim roared. "We can have the picnic in the shade!"

One of the small boys asked Churchill who was doing the hollering.

"Bosco, The Snake Eater," the colonel answered. "Run along now, son! You bother me!"

Pretty soon the tent was up and the sides pegged down, with the wagon right in the middle of it. The wagon doors were unlocked and we climbed out, all except José Hernandez, who fell out.

"Now we'll get ready for the grand matinee," Churchill announced. "My section of the carnival always gives a matinee. Gentlemen, I ask you now to reduce your clothing to the minimum. In other words, take off practically everything. You can't be freaks and be dressed up."

"Why of course," Hep agreed, and shucked himself out of his pants.

Jim Prather, noticing what was going on, yelled: "Why didn't you say we were going swimming?"

José was a little slow in getting started with his disrobing.

"Come, come, señor!" the colonel urged. "You couldn't possibly be a Hawaiian rear admiral with a shirt on. It just ain't done."

To make things easier and the freaks more agreeable Churchill, just at that minute, discovered that he had a flask in his hip pocket.

"Fine!" Prather hollered. "That'll keep us from catching cold when we go swimmin'!"

A couple of carnival hands came in and assisted in fixing us up. With some kind of coloring they painted Jim Prather blue from head to heels and tied a blanket around his middle.

"This paint'll keep me from gettin' swimming' cramps!" Jim yelled, and was pretty much pleased with the whole arrangement.

Churchill dragged a trunk into the tent that was full of queer looking clothing. José Hernandez got his cocked hat all right and his sword and spyglass. Hep, as the dog-faced man, got an imitation leopard skin tossed over him and a foolish-looking bulldog mask to put on his face. I, as the missing link, got a bear rug and a mask with a very long nose.

"I'm going to Utah," I said, and made a grab for my pants. But they weren't where I'd left 'em. Then I discovered that all our clothes had disappeared.

"Of course," Churchill exclaimed. "What would the customers think if they saw your clothes here? That

Year-round Reading pleasure

● You enjoyed the stories in this magazine. And isn't it a good idea to keep on enjoying them—throughout the year?

And a subscription would make an ideal gift to friends for birthdays . . . for going-away presents . . . or for convalescents.

But whether it's for yourself or someone else, fill out this coupon—now! It's good insurance for topnotch fiction that will come to you all year in regular dividends of reading pleasure.

WESTERN STORY
79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.
Dept. J-K3

Inclosed please find $4.00 for a year's subscription to Western Story.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....

wouldn't do at all. They're safely put away."

Hernandez was looking through the spyglass. "There ain't any glass in it," he complained. "The darn thing's just hollow!"

"All Hawaiian telescopes," the colonel reminded him, "are hollow. It's too bad, señor, that you haven't traveled more."

And with that the colonel went out of the tent and left a couple of the carnival crew to watch us. From the sounds outside it was pretty evident that a lot of people had now gathered there and a lot more were steadily gathering. Dogs were barking and kids were yelling and there was no end of excitement. And in addition to that José Hernandez had sat down and gone peacefully to sleep and was snoring.

"Where's the swimmin' water?" Jim Prather shouted.

But nobody paid any attention to him because by now Colonel Lunsford F. Churchill had raised his voice and was making a speech to the crowd. We could hear him through the tent.

"Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!" Churchill barked. "Bo-Bo, The Dog-faced Man! Ju-Ju, The Missing Link! Hctah, The Man From Mars! His Royal Highness, Prince Hilo Kokohulahula, Rear Admiral Of The Royal Hawaiian Navy! Hurry! Hurry Hurry! Hurry! Bosco, The Snake Eater! Minerva, The Bearded Lady! Mr. Spider, The Thin Man! Hurry! Hurry!"

The guy was wound up like a talking machine.

"Ain't it wonderful," Hep said.

"Even if the customers get in for nothing," I told him, "they'll be cheated. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves."

I'd expected the admission price to be a dime. Mebbe a nickel. It turned out to be a dollar At first folks laughed at this. We could hear them through the tent. Then the colonel really went to work on the crowd. He lied something awful. To hear him tell it this was such an opportunity that had never occurred before in the history of the world. The crowd quieted down. It was pretty evident that the guy was winning them over to the idea of parting with a buck each.

"Get your tickets, folks!" Churchill roared. "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Don't crowd! Don't crowd!"

Then it appeared that nobody could get inside until everybody had his ticket. It was only fair, Churchill explained, that everybody have an equal chance to look at the freaks. We could hear the click of dollars as Churchill gathered them in.

Suddenly the two carnival guys who were watching us ducked under the back of the tent and disappeared. At that instant Churchill yelled: "All right, folks Go right on in!"

The big flap of the tent was pushed aside and in came Bacaville, like a stampede of shorthorns! Apparently the entire population was in the crowd. For an instant the folks in front stood back and gaped at us in awe and wonder. We were quite a sight, all right, the four of us there beside the wagon. Jim Prather in his blue paint, looking utterly bewildered. The cantina man, snoring loudly. Hep, as white as a bed sheet.

Then some one shouted: "It's José Hernandez! We've been skinned!"

"Run!" Hep hollered. He was exactly twenty-four hours too late.

NEVERTHELESS we had a try at it. Him and me actually managed to get around the wagon. Then the crowd was upon us like a

cloudburst, carrying us along. We went *kerplunk* up against the back wall of the tent and then the whole tent came down and collapsed. Right on top of us and everybody else. From then on I didn't know much except that somebody had his foot in my face. Everybody was hollering and yelling and stampeding and trying to get out from under the tent.

Next I discovered that me and the other three freaks were in the Bacaville hoosegow. It was going on toward dusk. From off in the distance there came the sounds of pleasant music. We heard folks laugh and shout. It sounded like a carnival all right. Gallegher was looking through the bars. José was sleeping. Jim Prather was holding his head. All of us appeared to be greatly banged up.

"How's Bo-Bo, The Dog-faced Man?" I asked Hep.

"I feel like the devil," Hep answered sadly. "As well as silly. As well as having a pain in my head. This Colonel Churchill's turned out to be an awful rascal. Apparently the guy ain't got any more morals than a coyote. Why the dirty bum—"

Then after he'd calmed down he told me what had happened. The sheriff, it appeared, had told him. A few days before and quite a distance from Bacaville this gent, Churchill, had got in a poker game with the owner of the carnival and at the windup of the game found himself the owner of four wagons and a tent. He had persuaded some of the carnival hands to join him and they had driven the stuff off.

"The colonel's idea," Gallegher continued, "was to get here ahead of the real carnival and grab himself off some easy dough. He did it all right. He got himself about four hundred dollars. You and me and the other two freaks were supposed to occupy the attention of the crowd while Churchill and his pals escaped on horseback. They got away all right but a posse caught 'em and now they're in jail at Sabine Crossing. And we're in jail here."

"So I've noticed," I said.

"The real carnival's here now and everybody's havin' a good time," Hep resumed sorrowfully. "Listen to the pretty music of the hurdy gurdy."

Right then the sheriff came along and stuck his face up to the bars.

"Thirty days," he announced. "You're lucky. It oughta be thirty years. But I'm letting Jim Prather out now. He still thinks he's going swimming. And I'm letting José out tomorrow. It's no punishment to keep a man in jail who sleeps all the time. But it's different with you two birds."

The sheriff wasn't fooling either. By the time me and Hep got out of that Bacaville clink the snow on the pass was so deep that we couldn't have got to Utah without a snow plow. And besides that our horses were in hock with the livery man for horse fodder and we'd worn our boots out kicking at the bars and had holes in the seats of our pants from sitting down too much.

"We're undone," Hep said when, after thirty days, the jail door finally opened. "As well as falling apart. Don't you ever mention carnivals to me again!"

Which was quite a lot like him all right. By now he was pretty firmly of the notion that it was me who had talked him into being Bo-Bo, The Dog-faced Man!

THE END.

GUNSMOKE PURGE IN BIG PINE

BY WAYNE D. OVERHOLSER

A STRANGE way to visit an uncle, but the safe way, Clark Newell thought as he tied his black in a thicket of jack pines and dropped over the ridge to Tig Barnum's cabin on foot. Between fighting the Blue Peaks Logging Co. in general and its tough superintendent, Hove

Clark Newell blasted the trouble with the logging company wide open when he jumped the company's ace gunners.

Kane, in particular, old Tig was getting mighty edgy. He was likely as not to put a chunk of lead into anybody he saw riding across his property.

Kane wanted Tig's quarter section because it lay at the mouth of Easter Creek Canyon. The company couldn't run its spur on up the canyon until Tig sold out, and Tig wasn't inclined to sell. Not at the company's figure, anyhow. Newell was well aware that Kane would go to almost any length to get Tig out but he didn't think the superintendent would go as far as murder. But when Newell stepped into the clearing that held Tig's cabin, he suddenly leaped back into the timber again.

Hove Kane stood in the center of the clearing. Beside him was his top gun hand, Split-lip Corveen, slender fingers clutching a .45 and pointing it straight at the heart of Tig Barnum. No fear showed in the old man's wrinkled face, just plain rage that he'd been caught with his Winchester leaning against the cabin wall five feet away.

"I'm giving you one minute, Barnum," Kane was saying in his hard, metallic voice, "just one minute to deed this place over or you'll get a slug in your skinny belly, and don't ever think Split-lip won't put it there."

Kane and Corveen had their backs to Newell, twenty-five feet away. Tig wouldn't wait that sixty seconds. He'd make a try for his Winchester, a hopeless try that could have but one tragic ending. Newell cursed himself for not wearing his own gun. For weeks it had hung from a peg on his bedroom wall in Big Pine, left there purposely so Newell couldn't be goaded into doing something he'd regret later. Now the one time he needed his Colt, he didn't have it.

"Hustle up," Kane barked. "This is the showdown."

Newell hadn't thought Kane would be this low. Using money where it would do the most good, going in for beatings and robberies —those were company ways, but cold-blooded murder was something else. Yet here it was and with the seconds ticking away, Clark Newell had to make a play. Crazy it might be and useless, but he couldn't stand here and let Tig take Corveen's bullet.

"Ten seconds." Kane clipped the words.

Newell picked up a rock as big as his doubled fist and charged. He glimpsed Tig's amazed face, Kane whirling and grabbing for his gun, Corveen whipping around and dropping hammer. Lead screamed past, the roar of the gun pounded against his ears and echoed through the pines. Then Newell let the rock go, straight into Split-lip's evil face, and drove a fist at Kane's beaklike nose, felt it squash and saw the burst of blood.

Any second should bring the thunder of Corveen's gun again, the rip of a bullet into Newell's back, but no bullet came, and Newell made use of every second. Kane spun back as another sledge-hammer blow blasted against his square chin, tried to duck and run, but Newell was on him, swinging like a madman. Kane went down, his face dropping into the cold water of Easter Creek.

Newell whirled, took two steps toward where Corveen should be, but the gunman wasn't there. He was sitting on the ground, his face a red smear and over him was old Tig Barnum, Winchester in his hand.

"Just one peep out of you and you get it," Tig yelped. "Just one

peep and you'll shore git what you got comin'."

Newell took a deep breath. It had worked and the shoe was on the other foot. He picked up Kane's dropped gun and pulled the company man out of the water. Kane reeled, shook his head, and put a hand to his flattened nose.

"I knew you had it in you, Clark," Tig cackled. "You came chargin' out of there like a grizzly with a bur under his tail. Lookit Corveen there. He's sure gonna be ugly with a busted nose along with that lip. You busted Kane's, too. By hokey, you sure was tough on these gents' smellers."

Slowly Corveen got to his feet, his nose twisted grotesquely to one side.

"I ain't forgetting this, smart guy," he snarled, his mouth drawn down so that his split upper lip made him look more animal than human.

"You don't like it so good now, do you?" Newell grinned. "Not so good as when you had a gun in your claws bearing down on a man who wasn't heeled."

KANE had taken a white handkerchief out of his hip pocket and was carefully dabbing at his flattened nose. "For a man that runs a store in Big Pine you don't show much judgment, Newell," he growled through puffed lips. "You can look clear to hell and back for all the company business you'll get now."

"I suppose I'd show more judgment if I'd stayed under cover and watched you beef, Tig," Newell said coolly. "Maybe you won't look so good yourself when we tell what you and this gunslick were planning to do."

"Tell?" Tig snorted. "Why don't we just string 'em up right here. That pine over yonder's got a big enough limb."

Newell shook his head. "No, Tig, we've got to keep on the right side of the law, and we'd sure be into it with Jeb Sawtelle if we strung 'em up."

Kane put his handkerchief away, and let his cold, green eyes rest on Newell. He didn't look quite so sure of himself as he usually did. For the three years the Blue Peaks Logging Co. had operated around Big Pine he'd been the boss man of the valley, and it was something like an offense against royalty for anybody to lay a hand on him.

"I've tried to get along with you, Newell, knowing that you sympathized with these two-bit nesters that we've had to root out, but now I'm done. If you're smart you'll be out of the valley by night. Come on," he said to Corveen and wheeling, strode away, his gunman at his heels.

Tig brought his Winchester to his shoulder. "I'll just let 'em hear what a chunk of lead sounds like."

Newell grabbed the rifle barrel. "None of that. This is bad enough now."

"Bad enough," the oldster snorted. "I tell you we're making a mistake."

"Mebbe so." Newell watched Kane and Corveen until they had disappeared into the timber. Then he sat down on the cabin steps. He asked, "What happened?"

"They been keepin' their killers around here," Tig said dourly, "dustin' my pants with a little lead just to show they was around. I chased a couple of 'em off. Reckon they're still runnin'." He grinned, then went on soberly. "I was down gettin' a bucket of water and Splitlip got his gun on me. Old Big Breeches Kane thought that was a good time to make me sign over."

"What'd they offer?"

"Three thousand," Tig snorted. "A measly, dad-gummed three thousand. I told 'em it'd take twenty-five to get me out of here."

"Sounds like you raised the ante," Newell smiled.

"You betcha. One look at Splitlip's hardware pointin' my way and I figured I ought to get another five thousand."

Newell's smile broadened. Tig was about as handsome as a weather-beaten pine knot. Little, wizened, almost bald-headed, his blue eyes were as sharp as most men's fifty years younger. One hundred and a quarter pounds of dynamite, it would be like him to boost his price while looking into the bore of Corveen's Colt.

"What you aiming to do with all that money?" Newell asked. "That is, if and when you get it?"

"Look at that, nephew." Tig swung a skinny arm toward the brown, snag-covered hills that lay north and west of Big Pine. "Three years ago them mountings was as purty and pine growin' as this Easter Creek country. A lot of people lived there, folks that came in here with me and your pappy and mammy fifty years ago. They lived up in them canyons. Brown, Clay, Jones, Small; old people and young uns that you growed up with. In comes Kane and his cussed railroads, loggin', cuttin', and wreckin', leavin' litter behind that's nuthin' but a fire trap. Chasin' and kickin' everybody out, payin' 'em little or nuthin'. I aim to pay back a little company money to the folks that made this a white man's country."

Tig turned and pointed to the valley that lay below, green now with the spring rains, dotted here and there with the gray roof of a barn or house, the noon sun glittering on the whirling wheel of an occasional windmill.

"And look down there," the old man went on. "Them ranchers used to keep this country goin' long afore the damned company ever thought about puttin' a dollar in here and takin' out ten. No, sir, I've got Kane over a barrel and I'm aiming to lay it on thick. The best timber in the country's up Easter Creek and if he's gonna run his spur up here, he's got to go through my land, which same I ain't sellin' till I git what I want."

Clark Newell took out the makings and slowly shaped up a smoke. All this he knew, had known from the first.

"You're right," he nodded somberly, "but it doesn't change the fact that the company's got money and power. Kane won't stop at murder when it comes to getting what he wants. John Carridan's in town. Maybe we ought to have a talk with him."

"Who in sulphur'n' hell's this Carridan?"

"President of the company."

"President!" Tig howled. "What's he got to do with it? Kane's runnin' things, ain't he? Talk, talk, talk! That's all you do since you got behind that store counter. Why ain't you up there with your own outfit shovin' logs around? I can remember when you used to be the goldangest fightin' man—" Suddenly Tig stopped and his eyes softened. "Shucks, Clark. Guess I'm gettin' old and right forgetful. I plumb disrecollected how you came r'arin' out here with a rock in one hand and nuthin' in the other and rawhided them buzzards."

Newell got up and heeled out his half-smoked cigarette. He said, "Maybe I am getting soft, Tig." He looked down at his big hands and

remembered when they were hard from holding a peavey or an ax handle most of his waking hours.

"I didn't just mean it that way," the oldster answered. "I just git tired of hearin' about how big and mighty this company is. I'm right and they're wrong and, by jiminy, I'm gonna hang right here and rattle."

"Then I'm hanging with you." Suddenly Newell saw this thing in a different light. Tig's fight didn't look quite so foolish. He was right and the company was wrong. "How you making out with grub?" he asked.

"I'm 'bout out," Tig admitted. "Down to beans and bacon."

"I'll send Slim Beam and Vic Price out with some grub. They're not working now. I'll tell 'em to stay here for a few days and watch up there on the ridge."

"I don't need no—" Tig began, but Newell didn't wait to hear the rest of it. "So long," he called over his shoulder as he strode away. Tig thought he didn't need any help, but the old man underestimated Hove Kane.

NEWELL got his black and pointed him down the slope toward Big Pine. Once he looked back to where Easter Creek disappeared between the pine-studded shoulders of the Blue Peaks. Twenty miles away the rugged pinnacle of Eagle Crest showed itself against the sky, still white with much of the winter snow upon it. Between here and Eagle Crest was the best timber in the State, far better than anything that had fallen before the company saws.

Newell passed the end of the company's tracks. There was something grimly humorous in those two naked points of steel, jutting out into nowhere, magnificent monuments to a stubborn old man who hadn't scared easy.

Of one thing Clark Newell was sure. Kane wouldn't let this stalemate hold much longer. They were mopping up now along Cress Canyon and upper Sheep Creek. In a few days there'd be a hundred buckers and fallers out of work. Probably Kane would shove them up Easter Creek. Somehow he'd get his right of way and not to the tune of twenty-five thousand dollars.

Newell put his black to a ground-eating lope and thought about John Carridan. He was the one man who could stop this coming fight, and a fight it was going to be.

When he got to town Newell went to the Crystal Saloon and found the two punchers he sought.

"How'd you like a job where you might smell considerable powder smoke?" Newell asked.

Beam grinned and looked at Vic Price. "We're your huckleberries, Clark," he nodded.

"Go over to the store and get a couple of sacks of grub," Newell ordered. "Stock up with .45 and .30-30 shells. Ride out to Tig Barnum's place and give him half the grub. Go in mighty careful or he'll think you're some of Kane's men. Then hide out up on the rim somewhere so you can see Tig's cabin. Tig's gonna need help before very long. Stay up there till you hear from me or till your grub gives out."

Beam looked across the street to the Jack Pine Saloon where the company men hung out. "This job's gonna be to my liking, Clark," he muttered. "Let's go, Vic."

Newell stopped at the bar and asked for whiskey. Barney Higgins poured the drink, looked at Newell's bruised knuckles and chuckled.

"You wouldn't know anything

about Kane and Corveen getting their smellers flattened out, would you, Clark? They shore look funny. They got their faces all taped up like maybe they tangled with something too big for 'em."

Newell gulped his drink and went out of the saloon. He stepped into his store, saw that Beam and Price were outfitted, then told Gib Stewart, his clerk, that he'd be busy for another half hour or so.

Big Pine wasn't the town it had been three years before and Clark Newell, like all the old-timers, regretted the change. The company had brought money in, sure, and doubled the population, but in the old days it had been a drowsy place where men were friends and trouble seldom disturbed the even tenor of their ways. Now the sidewalks were crowded with tinhorns, painted percentage girls from the Jack Pine and the half dozen new saloons, burly loggers whose caulks had churned the floor of the Big Pine Hotel into a pulp. Every night had its fight and sometimes its killings. Jeb Sawtelle, the gaunt old sheriff, was as helpless in the face of all this as any man would have been who was used to the old easygoing days.

Newell passed the jail, a vacant lot, and in front of the new, two-story building that held the offices of the Blue Peaks Logging Co., met Split-lip Corveen. Barney Higgins hadn't called it wrong. The gunman's nose was buried under a mass of gauze and tape and his yellow eyes were bitter with hate.

"In case you got a bad memory, Newell," he snarled, "I'm telling you again to be out of town by night."

"Go to hell," Newell snapped, and started to go past.

"This ain't me talking," Corveen snapped, his arm barring the way. "If it was me, I'd say to go buckle your gun on and we'd have it out the right way. But the boss says no. If you don't say right now you'll pull your freight, you're gonna find yourself up to your neck in bad trouble."

"Tell Hove Kane to go roll his tail," Newell said. He jerked Corveen's arm down and went past him into the company's main office.

A stringy necked man got up from his desk. "What can I do for you?" he asked. His Adam's apple bobbed comically as he talked.

"You can tell Mr. Carridan I want to see him."

"I'm afraid he's too busy. He's only down here for a few days, and I—"

"Tell him I want to see him," Newell snapped.

The Adam's apple jerked a couple of times uncertainly, then the clerk turned and went through a door marked: HOVE KANE, PRIVATE. In a moment he was back.

"Mr. Carridan can see you," he announced. "If you'll just sit down and wait."

So Clark Newell sat down, his toes tapping loudly against the floor, the noise lost in the clatter from a dozen typewriters in the big room, but he was unconscious of the racket. He was thinking of Kane who'd aimed to murder Tig in cold blood, of Corveen's threat and the scheme that Kane had up his sleeve, whatever it was. Now Carridan was letting him cool his heels out here, too busy to see him. Too busy, hell! He got up and headed for Kane's office.

HEY, you can't go in there," the stringy-necked clerk croaked. He hopped up and almost swallowed his Adam's apple as Newell shoved him out of the way and went through the door, closing it behind

him. He hadn't even been conscious of the sudden hush in the big room as a dozen girls' fingers hovered above their typewriters, startled eyes following his lean figure into Kane's office.

Newell thought he'd find Kane inside but there was only one man behind the desk, a gray-haired, square-jawed man with more tan on his face than Newell expected to see.

"You John Carridan?" Newell asked, and stood spread-legged across the desk.

"I'm Carridan," the company president acknowledged. He looked up and Newell, who could judge men better than most, felt that this was an honest man but a stubborn one.

"My name's Clark Newell. I've got a little logging outfit up Bennet Creek. I own a store here in town. Tig Barnum's my uncle."

"Take your beef to Kane." Carridan's eyes dropped to the sheaf of papers he held in his hand.

Newell laughed, a hard, brittle laugh that brought Carridan's eyes up again. He said sharply, "I know Kane. That's why I'm talking to you. I want to know if this robbing and attempted murder is company policy, or is it Kane's idea?"

Carridan laid down the papers. "I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about," he said.

"Then I'll tell you. Tig Barnum owns the mouth of Easter Creek Canyon and he won't sell for the price Kane's offering, so Kane sends some gun-slingers up there to slam a little lead around Tig's nose. Then Kane comes up today and gets the drop on Tig. He was aiming to make Tig sign or kill him. I got there in time to stop it. Now I'm asking—is that company policy when it comes to getting what it wants?"

"Murder?" Carridan shook his head. "No, but I've got an idea you're mistaken."

"I tell you I saved Tig's life by seconds," Newell snapped.

The office door slammed open. "There he is, Jeb." It was Hove Kane.

Newell whirled. Sawtelle was coming toward him. "I'll have to arrest you, Clark," he said apologetically. "Kane swore out a warrant. Says you tried to kill him on company property."

"Kill him?"

"You got a bad memory," Kane smirked. "Me and Corveen was looking over the spur we've got up toward Easter Creek. Newell here sneaks up on us and sails into us with a club."

"You blasted liar," Newell barked.

"So that's it," Carridan breathed. "And you trying to put that cock-and-bull story down my throat."

"Carridan," Newell warned, "if you let Jeb arrest me on Kane's say-so, you're gonna start more trouble than you ever saw."

"Get him out, sheriff." Carridan's eyes dropped to his papers again as he muttered, "I'm busy."

Newell went out, Sawtelle and Kane following him. The stringy-necked clerk grinned. Corveen was waiting on the sidewalk.

"There's just one piece of advice I've got," Kane said. "If you're smart, Newell, you'll draw up your will this afternoon."

"Reckon it ain't that bad," Sawtelle grunted.

"The boys ain't gonna like it," Kane sneered, "when Split-lip here tells 'em what happened."

"If you're thinking of a necktie party, get it out of your head," Sawtelle said sternly. "I've never lost a man out of my jail yet."

"It's not what I'm thinking about.

It's what the boys'll do." Kane wheeled and strode away.

"I don't like it, Clark," Sawtelle said as he closed the cell door on Newell. "Looks to me like if you set out to get them jiggers, they'd have more'n busted beaks."

Anger boiled up within Newell as he sat down on his cot and heard Sawtelle's step recede down the corridor and his office door slam. This was what a man got when he tried to buck anything as big as the Blue Peaks Logging Co. Kane wasn't talking through his hat when he threatened a lynching party. Newell was Tig's heir. Kane meant to get both of them. Then the company would shoot their spur up Easter Creek and take care of the legal technicalities later.

The smart thing, and Newell saw it now, was to have buckled on his gun belt and fought it out with Kane and Corveen in the only way they could understand. Now he was helpless and in the morning he'd likely be dead. A few words to the hangers-on in the Jack Pine, and maybe to some of the company men brought down from the camp on Sheep Creek, would be enough.

DUSK came and a hubbub in the street. Newell didn't know what it was, and he didn't care. For the tenth time he tugged at the bars in the window, threw his weight against the steel door. Then Sawtelle came with his supper.

"No use, Clark," he said. "It's a good jail." He hesitated as if there were something he had to say, and didn't want to. Finally he blurted, "They got Vic Price. Slim Beam rode in while ago with a slug in his shoulder. He brought your uncle Tig in."

Newell was on his feet, clutching a steel bar of the door until his knuckles were white.

"Tig's dead?" he rasped.

Sawtelle shook his head. "He'll live. Put up a hell of a scrap, Slim says."

"Kane's men," Newell muttered.

"Probably," the sheriff nodded, "but there's no proof." He turned to go and then stopped. "A few of your friends are in the Crystal and a gang of Kane's are in the Jack Pine. Hell's gonna pop tonight. Wish you was out of here."

"You might arrange it."

"Can't do that," Sawtelle said somberly. "But I ain't letting no gang of hard cases take one of my prisoners neither." He strode purposefully down the corridor.

Hope died in Newell's heart. There was no chance then. If he could get out, maybe he could make John Carridan see straight. The feeling within him was strong that Carridan was honest, that the crooked work was Kane's.

The purple of dusk flowed down from the mountains and around Big Pine, then night blotted out the shadows. The yowling from the street grew louder, roaring curses and threats, the jangle of tinny pianos, the occasional thunder of a gun.

It wouldn't be much longer. Sawtelle came then, a kerosene lamp in his hand, his gaunt form throwing a long shadow down the corridor. He set the lamp on a table and stepped up to the bars.

"That wild bunch in the Jack Pine's getting mighty mean," he said.

"Let me out of here," Newell shouted.

"Can't let you out, not of my own free will, Clark," Sawtelle said doggedly, but he didn't move.

Then Newell saw the play. Sawtelle wanted to keep his job. New-

ell shot his hands through the bars, one gripping Sawtelle's skinny shoulder, the other grabbing his gun.

"All right," Newell barked, the Colt poking the sheriff in the belly. "Open the door."

The big key turned, the door swung out, and anybody watching would never have known Sawtelle wanted his prisoner to escape.

"Let me have your gun belt," Newell ordered.

"Go out the back door," Sawtelle murmured, and handed his gun belt to Newell. "Better slope out of town."

"I've got work to do," Newell answered. He pushed Sawtelle into the cell and the door clanged shut behind him. Newell dropped the keys and ran out of the back door.

Minutes counted now. He paused in the alley. The mob was in the street, moving toward the jail, men's voices blending together in a roar that sounded like surf pounding on rocks. Only seconds were left.

Newell's mind was racing. Carridan meant to be here only a few days. He'd probably be in the office working late. Maybe Kane would be with him. Newell ran down the alley, across the vacant lot, and around the corner of the company building.

"There's Newell," some one yelled.

The mob rolled toward the company office, fifty voices roaring, "Get Newell."

Newell raced across the office building porch, tried to open the door, but it was locked. A light was burning inside and he could see Carridan bending over the desk.

"Carridan," Newell yelled, and pounded on the door, but the thunder of the mob drowned his efforts to attract Carridan.

The mob came on like a pack of hungry wolves, thirsting for the blood of this one man who stood before them. Newell whirled to face them, hand hovering over gun butt, but he knew that there was little he could do to stand off fifty half-drunk hellions goaded on by the savage urge to take his life. Hove Kane and Split-lip Corveen had done their work well.

Then things happened. Jeb Sawtelle raced around the edge of the office building, a gun in each hand.

"Stand where you are!" he bellowed. "There ain't gonna be no lynching in this town."

In that same instant Slim Beam ran down the sidewalk from the Crystal Saloon, one hand in a sling, the other clutching a Colt. A dozen men crowded behind him, settlers and ranchers who had heard the showdown had come.

The mob's progress slowed and halted in the middle of the street. Tackling one man was different from the fifteen that loomed before them now. Newell sensed the change in feeling.

"Go on back to the Jack Pine," he shouted at them. "There's gonna be more than my blood spilled if you cross the center of that street."

SLIM BEAM and the men with him had lined up alongside Newell and Jeb Sawtelle. It would be a straight-out gun fight now, with the odds in numbers still on the side of the loggers. Split-lip Corveen saw that as he shouldered toward the front of the mob.

"To hell with Newell," Corveen yelled. "We came for him, didn't we? Are we gonna let a dozen bluff us out? Come on, let's get Newell."

The fight was here. There was nothing under God's heaven Newell could do to stop it unless he gave himself up. Within seconds blood would flow in the streets of Big Pine

and lifeless bodies would spill into the dust. Newell tensed. Corveen was in the lead, a burly logger beside him holding a torch high.

"Hold it, you Blue Peaks men," a voice rose above the growl of the mob. Carridan had pushed himself past Sawtelle and stood beside Newell. "The company men belong in camp, not raising the devil in town. Get on back or you won't have a job tomorrow." Carridan whirled to face Kane who had come out of the building behind him. "You're fired, Kane. I'm having no sneak thief on my pay roll. Arrest him, sheriff."

"Try it!" Kane snarled. "I'm gonna get you, Newell." His hand whipped down to gun butt.

One thought raced through Newell's mind. A gunshot might set off the explosion. As Kane's hand came up with his gun, Newell swung a short punch that caught Kane on the tip of his square jaw and slammed him back against the wall of the building. His feet skidded out from under him and he didn't move after he hit the porch.

"If Kane ain't working for the company, I ain't either," Corveen yelled. "I came after Newell, and I'm gonna git him."

Split-lip's hand sliced down in a sure, quick draw. There was nothing for Newell to do but match that speed. Guns roared. Lead screamed past Newell's ears and ripped into the wall behind him but Corveen didn't fire again. He tottered, hand clutching at his blood-soaked shirt, and sprawled full length into the dust of the street.

"Get on back to where you belong," Carridan shouted at his men before the gun echoes died, and the loggers retreated. They knew Carridan and that he meant what he said.

"There's to be no more trouble," Carridan said, facing the Big Pine men on the office porch. "I didn't know what was happening here until today, but I had a talk with the banker after listening to Newell and I know you've been robbed. Every one of you who thinks he has a claim against the company come to my office tomorrow and I promise to deal fairly with you. Now get off the street before trouble starts again."

They went quickly as if they were afraid Carridan might change his mind.

"Well, Clark," Sawtelle said, "guess I'll drop the charges against you, seeing as there's only one witness left."

"You kinda changed your mind," Newell grinned at Carridan.

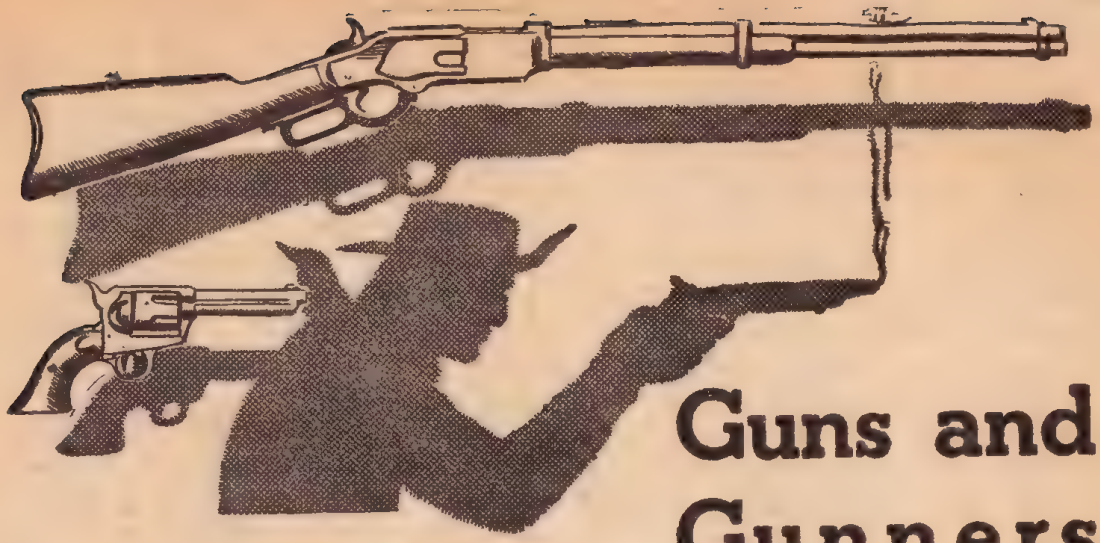
"I got onto things when I was talking to Kane tonight," Carridan answered. "He got himself so crossed up any fool could tell he was lying. I'm sorry I didn't believe you this afternoon but you did the company a favor, Newell. How'd you like to have Kane's job?"

Newell's eyes widened in surprise. Then he shook his head. "I reckon not, but thanks just the same. I'd rather run my own business." He looked down at his skinned knuckles. "Guess I ought to get out with my men and do a little work. I'm getting kind of out of shape. Now I'd better see how Tig's making out."

As Newell strode down the street, Carridan looked at Kane, who was beginning to stir.

"You can arrest that," he said to Sawtelle, and raised his eyes to stare after Newell. He muttered, "I'd sure hate to see him hit a man when he's really in shape."

THE END.



Guns and Gunners

By PHIL SHARPE

PERHAPS one of the most popular and most widely known automatic pistols ever manufactured is the world-famous German Luger. It is also the most difficult gun on the market to describe. This is due to the many variations in design, parts, and quality of manufacture.

The Luger automatic pistol is essentially a military gun and countless thousands of these have been sold in the United States and throughout the world. It is, or has been at various times, the service side arm of Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Portugal, Brazil, Bulgaria, and many other countries.

The Luger is essentially a German gun, but, strange as it may seem, it was born in the State of Connecticut. The action is made on the same general principle as that of the American Maxim machine gun, which proved popular at the turn of the century, but the pistol mechanism was designed by an American named Borchardt. Early models of the German gun were known as the Borchardt-Luger.

Many of the inquiries we receive ask if the gun described is a "genuine" Luger, since some advertising mentions the "genuine" form. Actually, the Luger is a Luger. It is pretty hard to say what is genuine and what is not. I do not know of any imitation Luger ever having been made. However, this German gun has been made in various factories more or less under the supervision of the German government, and it is possible that the importers handling the D. W. M. Luger intended to describe this as genuine.

The following list of literature is available to our readers: STRAIGHT SHOOTING, SNAP SHOOTING, WINCHESTER AMMUNITION HANDBOOK, SAVAGE, STEVENS, FOX, COLT, SMITH & WESSON, HARRINGTON & RICHARDSON, 3c each; MOSSBERG, MARLIN, 2c each; WESTERN AMMUNITION HANDBOOK, 5c; REMINGTON ARMS AND AMMUNITION, 6c; and a large three-pound bundle of assorted catalogs, 30c each and 38c west of Chicago. None can be sent to Canada. Postage stamps are accepted.

Application blanks for membership in the National Rifle Association may be obtained by writing to Mr. Sharpe. Be sure you print your name clearly and inclose a three-cent stamp with your request.

The Luger is perhaps one of the best-balanced automatic pistols ever designed, but the mechanism leaves a great deal to be desired. Unfortunately, most of the Lugers on the American market today—used guns—were left over from the World War or brought back by ex-service men as souvenirs.

In the early 1920s, thousands of scrapped Lugers, mostly assembled from rejected wartime parts, were hastily dumped on the American market at prices in the vicinity of twelve or fifteen dollars. This material is of such poor quality that it cannot be classified as reliable, and frequently breaks down. A good quality prewar Luger—made before 1914—or a Luger as made today, is an excellent gun except for its natural weaknesses.

The Luger is designed so all mechanism is just above the hand, and the gun is essentially muzzle light. However, on account of its general design, it is more or less of a natural pointing gun, due to the angle of the grip, and it is comparatively easy to shoot.

Weakest point in the Luger design is the trigger mechanism which runs around several corners. Thus if you have a poor or rough trigger pull on a Luger, it is merely characteristic, and nothing can be done to smooth it up.

Luger guns are generally manufactured in what is known as the Old Model and the New Model. The dividing line between the two is rather difficult to describe, since many of the so-called new models contain many characteristics of the old. Generally speaking, however, the round, knurled buttons on the breech mechanism on the genuine old model have been tapered off to practically half buttons, whereas on the latest or new model, these are fully shaped. The mechanism of the later type contains a coil main spring, whereas the original job had a flat spring.

Luger guns are made in various barrel lengths, ranging from four inches through six, eight and twelve-inch types. Actually, these measurements are a small fraction of an inch shorter than given, due to the fact that the metric system is used.

Lugers are also made in two different calibers, 7.65 mm. or .30 caliber, and the 9 mm. or .36 caliber. This 9 mm. compares favorably with various .30 caliber guns on the market.

The .30-caliber Luger uses a lightweight 93-grain bullet at a velocity of about 1,200 foot seconds. The 9 mm. type has a 124-grain bullet at a velocity of about 1,050 foot seconds. Remington produces a 9 mm. Luger pistol cartridge at a velocity of 1,210, which greatly increases the power.

Due to existing conditions, it is next to impossible to get repair service and parts for Luger automatic pistols, and if you are offered one of these guns, be sure it bears a pre-War date, and that all parts appear to be smooth and with a high degree of finish. Guns produced during the War or shortly thereafter have a rough, poor quality of finish and workmanship.

This department has been designed to be of practical service to those who are interested in guns. Mr. Sharpe will gladly answer any question you may have concerning firearms. Just address your inquiries to Phil Sharpe, Guns and Gunners Department, Street & Smith's Western Story, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. *Be sure you print your name clearly and inclose a three-cent stamp for your reply. Do not send a return envelope.*

Mines and Mining

By J. A. THOMPSON

WHEN one of our readers strikes it rich, that's headline news as far as we are concerned. And proof, as we have been stating here for years, that good gold mines, the kind that may put you on Easy Street for the rest of your life, can still be found in the Western mining country.

So we are going to sit back this week, and let M. F. W., who has been prospecting out in the southern California desert mining areas, tells the story of his find just as he told it to us in his interesting letter. M. W. F. has been a steady follower of these pages for a long time. He knows the West, and he knows mining. Yet his big discovery was made on a deer hunt.

"It has been quite a while since I last wrote you for some mining information," M. W. F.'s letter leads off. "This time instead of asking more questions, I want to tell you of some very good luck three of us prospecting partners have had in southern California.

"While we were deer hunting last season, we climbed up through a low saddle between two hills. It looked like good deer country. Walking over to a big pile of granite boulders, we gazed around, our eyes searching the brush and scrub timber for any sign of the game we were after. Suddenly my gaze anchored on a spot almost directly across a narrow canyon. Even when I am hunting, prospecting is uppermost in my blood, and I was convinced that what I saw was the half-buried remains of some old mine workings.

"Right then I forgot all about venison steaks for supper, and scrambled down through brush and over high boulders until I finally came to the other side of the canyon and climbed it to the old mine workings. They must have been very old. The tunnel into the rock had caved for about fifty feet. I called my companions, and they came over on the run. What little work we could do without proper digging tools convinced us that I had discovered an old Indian or Spanish mine. The few oak timbers we were able to uncover were rotten with age, and buried in the rocks and earth.

"Next we began exploring the almost brush-buried dump and found several small piles of high-grade quartz, and I mean *high*. It was spotted with visible gold. Some of the chunks had streaks of wire gold running through it. Other pieces had gold sticking out of the rock in flakes, one of which was the size of your pinky fingernail. The piles looked as if they had been brought out of the mine by hand, or perhaps in small baskets, and set aside for hand grinding and recovery of their gold.

"Deer hunting was over for us that trip. We took plenty of bearings on the exact location, covered the old workings up again with brush as best we could, and got back to town. Oh, yes, we told them in town we had had no luck—deer hunting—which wasn't exactly a lie. At the first chance we got we went back with a wheelbarrow and picks and shovels to make a real attempt at opening up the old workings.

"This is not a lost-mine story, Mr. Thompson. At least not as far as we are concerned. We found the place again readily enough and started in to work. Just inside the portal we uncovered a shaft. As yet we have not reached the bottom of it, but ore samples we took along the vein in the shaft returned assays of eighty-seven dollars in gold a ton. Some of the individual samples ran up as high as fifteen hundred dollars a ton, according to assay figures.

"So far our main trouble in opening the mine has been caused by slides. The granite rock in which the vein lies is a dark, mustardy yellow, and very badly decomposed. At the least jar it starts breaking away and sliding, and when we put in our timbering, whether posts, caps, sills or lagging, we have to be careful that we don't get caught and trapped by a slide. Sometimes we wonder if this is what could have happened to the original workers of the mine. It isn't likely that anyone would have voluntarily left it with those little piles of picture ore beside the dump.

"North of this first tunnel we discovered another tunnel, evidently part of the workings of this same mine. The dumps, despite the weathering and washing away of years, are still quite large. Apparently a lot of underground work was done at one time on the mine. There is, as far as we have been able to discover, no indication of any modern, or fairly recent work. We have not found any broken tools, or anything like that. Figured from the rotted condition of the oak timbers in this dry climate, we estimated the workings to be at least sixty or seventy years old, maybe much older. The quartz in the dump is reddish, as if it contained a lot of weathered iron. In the tunnels the quartz ore seems to be two distinct types and colors. One is a dirty, dull, grayish-white that does not carry such good values. The other, a bluish-gray, so far has held to a pretty steady average assay of eighty-seven dollars a ton. Our immediate job is to open the main tunnel where the shaft is, so that we can find out how far the tunnel goes into the hill, and how deep the shaft is. Then we will start extracting ore.

"Meantime, even at this writing, I think I can safely say that that sure was a mighty successful deer hunt for me."

Successful, and then some, M. W. F. Our congratulations. We were plenty glad to hear of your find, and wish you all the luck in the world with it. We'll be eagerly waiting to hear further developments.

● **We desire to be of real help to our readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.**

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be published in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

The Hollow Tree

By HELEN RIVERS

We start the ball rolling this week with a letter from Elizabeth Palmer from down Argentina way. Our group of South American friends is growing by leaps and bounds and we're mighty happy to welcome them all here at the old Hollow Tree. Elizabeth says in her letter that she's keen about swing music—doesn't that make Buenos Aires seem like it were just across the State line? If you take time out to write to her, you'll probably find that you have lots more interests in common with this little South American girl, too, so here's her letter and hop to it!

Dear Miss Rivers:

I hope you will find a space in your magazine to publish this plea for a Pen Pal. I am sixteen years old and my favorite sports are swimming, skating and tennis. I am very keen on swing music. I would be grateful for any answers and please, Pals, inclose photos.—Elizabeth Palmer, Rodriguez Pena 1985, Buenos Aires, Argentina, South America

---

Alfred is ready and waiting for your replies—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Have you any room in your Hollow Tree for my plea? Writing is one of my chief hobbies. I am a nineteen-year-old enrollee in the CCCs. I would like to hear from girls and boys from every State in the Union as well as those living in foreign countries. I will try to answer all who write me. Let me sling a little ink your way.—Alfred Fennell, Company 1708, Mulberry, Arkansas

---

Lillian wants to hear from everyone—

Dear Miss Rivers:

While I have been reading Western Story for some time, this is my first attempt to make friends through the Hollow Tree. I'm hoping you will print my letter, as I would like to hear from 'most anybody who cares to write, and I will answer all letters. I am twenty-one years old, like all sports, especially football and skating, and I'm also crazy about dancing. I'll be waiting to hear from everybody, so won't you write to me?—Lillian Williams, 39 W. South Street, Akron, Ohio

---

Adventuresome tales waiting for you here—

Dear Miss Rivers:

This is my first attempt to crash the Hollow Tree although I have corresponded with members whose letters have been published there. I would like now to write to as many Pen Pals as I can get, and I promise faithfully to answer all letters and send a photo. I am just a lonely sailor who hails from the State of Kentucky. I have been in the navy about three years and have traveled in many foreign lands and seen many interesting places—Hawaii, Haiti, Panama, Cuba, Jamaica, and many others. I have all kinds of stories to tell you of my adventures and exciting experiences. My favorite pastimes are dancing, horseback riding and skating, and I am a fiend for photography. To all you Pals who answer soon, I will send some very interesting pictures of foreign lands. I would especially like to hear from members of the fair sex and promise to answer all letters the very day they are received, so come on, Pen Pals, and let me hear from you.—W. Fred Bowles, Supply Department, U. S. S. *Utah*, Pearl Harbor, T. H.

Jessie is lonesome—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Will you help me find a few Pen Pals? I am nineteen years old and love all kinds of sports and my hobby is collecting songs. Come on, all of you between eighteen and twenty-five and please write to a lonely girl. I will exchange snapshots so, boys and girls, fill my mailbox.—Jessie Moore, Moore's Creek, Kentucky

---

From Newfoundland comes this plea—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Can you spare a space in the Hollow Tree for me? I am a sixteen-year-old boy who would like Pen Pals from anywhere. I am interested in all kinds of sports and collecting stamps. I

would be glad to get Newfoundland stamps for anyone who would like some. Everybody write to me.—Bruce Kean, 14 Allandale Road, St. John's, Newfoundland

Margaret has varied interests—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am an ardent reader of Western Story and never miss a copy. The stories are packed full of excitement and adventure and that's what one wants in a good Western story. I have been reading your letters in the Hollow Tree, and I would sincerely like to become a member. I would enjoy writing to people all over the United States, as corresponding is one of my hobbies. I am nineteen years old and love all outdoor sports, also singing, dancing and dramatics. I'll answer all letters and exchange snapshots. I'm eager to get Pen Pals from all over, so how about dropping me a line, boys and girls? I'll be waiting.—Margaret Sheehan, 57 Western Avenue, Westfield, Massachusetts

Ranch dwellers, write to Armando—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I hope you will find room for my plea. I am sixteen years old and am greatly interested in the West. I would like to hear from boys between sixteen and twenty years of age who live on ranches. As a hobby I collect Western songs and play the guitar. Will exchange snapshots and songs, so come on, fellows, and drop me a line. I'll answer, I promise.—Armando Donato, 89 Gordon Avenue, Cascade, New Hampshire

Jane collects post cards—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a fifteen-year-old girl and love all sports, especially football, basketball, horseback riding and tennis. My favorite hobbies are post-card collecting and corresponding. So, boys and girls, won't you please hear my plea and take a chance? I promise to answer all letters, so please write.—Jane Griswold, 45 Graves Avenue, Guilford, Connecticut

Dan can spin a hair-raising tale about the old West—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Been reading Western Story for some time now and enjoy it very much, as I am one of the few remaining cowboys of the old West when the six-gun was law. Went West as a button, worked on some of the biggest ranches in the Northwest, got mixed up in a cattle war, and ended up with my own ranch in Wyoming. Being still a kind of adventurous young feller of seventy-nine, I am starting on the Western trail again to visit some of the old haunts, so, boys and girls, drop a lonesome old cowpoke a line.—Dan Van Valkenburgh, Mt. Hermon, Massachusetts

Peggy will exchange souvenirs—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I would like very much to join in the fun of the Hollow Tree and hear from people all over the world. I am a fifteen-year-old girl and am very fond of outdoor life. I enjoy swimming and skating very much and I promise to answer all letters and will exchange snapshots and souvenirs. Here's hoping I receive lots of letters.—Peggy Rynerson, 712 West Ash, Dodge City, Kansas

Don't overlook Everett's S O S—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I have been a faithful reader of Western Story for a long time and think it is the greatest magazine ever published. I am twenty-seven years old, like all sports and have many odd hobbies. Reading and writing letters is my favorite pastime. Come on, girls and boys, and give me a break.—Everett Williams, Hardburly, Kentucky

And this plea is from a bonnie Scots lassie—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I wonder if you would print my request for pen friends the world over. I am a sixteen-year-old Scots girl who is interested in sports and the movies. I would like to exchange photographs and souvenirs. Please write to me.—Catherine McFarlane, 21 Kirkconnel Avenue, Knightswood, Glasgow W. 3, Scotland

How about answering this CCC enrollee—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am very much in need of a Pen Pal. Won't some boy or girl write to me? I am eighteen years old and like all sports and dancing very much. I promise to answer all letters that come to me and will exchange snapshots with all who write. Come one, come all—who will be the first to write to a lonesome CCC boy?—Leroy Huggins, CCC Company 1803, Ratcliff, Texas

Andrew has a hankerin' to see the West—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I hope you've saved enough space for a twenty-five-year-old red-headed farm hand. I am interested in hearing from Pals living in the Western States, particularly Montana and Wyoming. Also fellows between twenty-one and twenty-five years of age who might like to take a trip out into that country. I have a Chevvy coupe, but my favorite means of locomotion is my Harley Davidson. Will send snaps to the first three who write, and I'll have some more snapshots soon for the rest of you. All who write will receive prompt replies.—Andrew Rouse, R. D. No. 4, Wellsboro, Pennsylvania

Lots of cheery letters needed here—

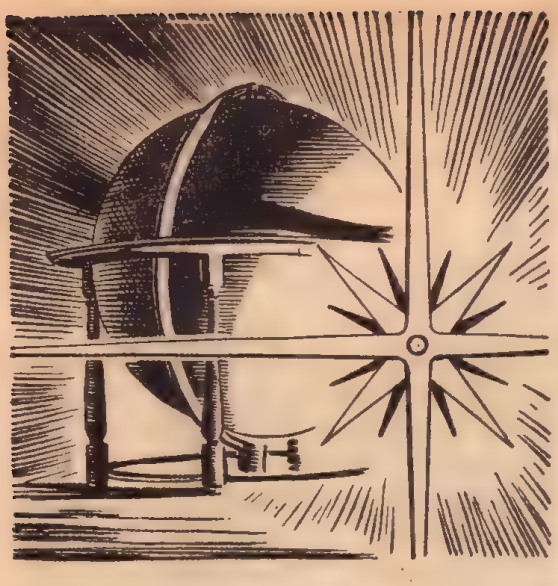
Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a young girl just turned twenty-one. I have been out of the hospital only three weeks and have to stay indoors most of the time, so I have plenty of spare time on my hands. I would like to hear from Pen Pals from all parts of the world and will answer all letters. My hobbies are music, reading and aviation. Please, Pen Pals, make my lonely days bright and sunny with your many letters.—Virginia Osborne, R. R. No. 1, Box 48, Kewanee, Illinois

Betty is a little "Georgia Peach"—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a fourteen-year-old girl and would like to hear from boys and girls all over the world. I like sports of all kinds and will exchange snapshots with all who will answer this plea, so come on, Pals, and write.—Betty Humphries, Route No. 1, Doraville, Georgia



Where to go and how to get there

By JOHN NORTH

LAND that formerly supported a heavy timber growth is apt to be rich. Add a pleasant year-around climate, long growing season, cool summers, and little snow in winter, and you have some of the main reasons why the upper Skagit River valley in western Washington offers settlers "new" country in which to gain a farm foothold and enviable living independence. And it can be done with only a modest amount of capital to start on.

It is just such a start that E. B. is anxious to make. His letter from Montgomery, Alabama, says: "I want to get back to the land, some land of my own on which I can raise crops and do a little diversified farming. I sort of lean to the Pacific Northwest, and am writing you for information on this part of the country. How about the upper Skagit River valley, the section I am particularly interested in? Is the soil there as rich as I have heard it is? Are land costs high? Can you give me a rough idea of how much it costs per acre?"

E. B.'s questions are all straight to the point, and he has picked himself a mighty fine section of the Pacific Northwest. In the first place, the richness of the Skagit County farm soil is no idle, local boast. Extensive Federal government tests have backed the statement and given the soil a rating as high as any in the United States.

The upper Skagit River valley, the "new" country, stretches eastward back toward the mountains from the already more highly developed portion of Skagit County. The busy little city of Sedro Woolley is the business center for the numerous nearby tributary valleys. The bottom lands of these valleys have an alluvial loam type of soil that changes at the higher bench lands to a local "chocolate" clay loam of high crop-producing qualities.

All this country was formerly heavily timbered. And the timber stand has only recently been harvested. An inspection trip of these valleys today is sure to disclose the sight of a brother "newcomer" clearing land with a bulldozer, or hewing down trees remaining on his own land to hand-build either a dwelling, or a needed barn almost entirely from split cedar, even to the uprights and rafters. Often the only cash outlay needed in such structures is for doors, windows and incidental hardware.

A true sense of real frontier pioneering permeates the entire section. The activities are definitely American and progressive. Yet proof of the undoubted agricultural possibilities of the section is amply afforded by the already developed

farms and comfortable well-kept homes in the vicinity.

In the cleared and cultivated areas are fine, improved farms, grazing dairy herds and poultry farms. Other specialty farms have developed to high productivity such diversified crops as strawberries, walnuts, filbert nuts, drug plants such as ginseng and golden seal, and fruit orchards. There are canning and quick-freezing plants in the neighborhood that offer a ready market for berry and fruit products.

There are paved roads leading in all directions from Sedro Woolley, the hub town of the region. Though Sedro Woolley itself has a population of between three and four thousand it serves a territory perhaps fifty miles in radius. All church denominations are represented in the town which has fine grade and high schools, creameries, some hardwood and shingle mills, and is the home of the Northern State Hospital.

Moreover, it does not necessarily take much initial capital to get started in this section of the friendly Northwest. We know of a man and his family who made it, arriving from Texas with about a hundred dollars in cash, and an old car. Maybe he was an exception, but he now has five acres of the unimproved cut-over tract he settled on in crops, ten acres ready for pasture land, and a fine weather-tight cedar shake home that he built himself from second-growth timber on the land when he got it.

This family started virtually from scratch. Others sometimes prefer to locate on partially improved, or well-improved already established farms.

And prices naturally vary with the location, the state of development and the improvements on the tract, if any. Therefore definite prices cannot be given in a general article of this sort. But a rough idea can be gathered from the fact that unimproved and partially improved lands cost generally from about fifteen to fifty dollars an acre. Improved farms run from about fifty dollars an acre upward. In either case whether the lands are improved or unimproved, it is almost always possible to purchase them on fayorable time-payment terms.

Rainfall and the frost-free growing season are important considerations in any farm-country section. In the Skagit County area the growing season usually extends from about the middle of April to October 20th, and the average annual rainfall is in the neighborhood of forty-six inches.

To J. P. Y., East Orange, New Jersey: Maxwell, New Mexico, is a small town in Colfax County in the northeastern part of the State. Cattle, hog raising and dairying are carried on in the vicinity. Principal agricultural crops are alfalfa, sugar beets and small grains. The town itself is headquarters for the Maxwell irrigated lands comprising about twenty-three thousand acres. The very first farming in Colfax County was done in this section back in 1843 by Kit Carson and L. D. Maxwell.

● We aim to give practical help to readers. Mr. North will be glad to answer specific questions about the West, its ranches, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. He will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to him, for he is always glad to assist you to the best of his ability. Be sure to inclose a stamped envelope for your reply.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Part Four

TRAIL of the Thundering Herds

BY BENNETT FOSTER

The Story So Far:

Rusty Shotridge, a young cowpuncher, takes a job with the trail herd which is being sent to Dodge City by Colonel Watrous. Leonard Carlisle, a young Easterner, who is part owner of the herd, also goes along as a hand. Inexperienced himself, he is jealous and resentful of Rusty, a top hand.

From the start of the drive, Rusty is aware of tension, and his suspicions are aroused when Scott McBride, the trail driver, decides merely to earmark the herd instead of taking time to have it branded. With the exception of Rusty, Carlisle and two old Watrous hands, McBride's crew is made up of hard-bitten, silent men who seem on the watch for trouble.

The drive goes along smoothly until the herd crosses the Red River into the Nations, wild, dangerous country where there is no law. Then the weather changes and one night when the herd is bedded down a storm breaks and the cattle stampede.

Next morning it is discovered that McBride is dead—killed in the stampede—and that the Watrous cattle have run into the herd driven by Slippery Smith which has been following them up the trail. Rashly, Carlisle decides to take over the job of trail driver himself and appoints Honey Yates, one of McBride's trusted men, to help him. The cattle is rounded

up, cut into the two herds and a count taken. According to Rusty's estimate, the tally is short five hundred head, but when he mentions the fact to Carlisle the latter refuses to believe him. Joe Deems, one of the old Watrous hands, also calls the miscount to Carlisle's attention, however, and the young owner reluctantly calls for another tally.

Infuriated by Carlisle's decision, Yates and the men backing him go for their guns, but Rusty beats them to it and expels them from camp afoot. They eventually find their way to Slippery Smith's herd—now increased by five hundred head of the Watrous cattle—and Yates vows that he will make Rusty pay for what he has done.

CHAPTER XII

GUN FIGHT ON THE CANADIAN

Rusty Shotridge and his crew moved the herd on toward the Canadian. When Kansas, leaving Rusty, loped ahead to point the way toward the river, Rusty fell into place in the drag. Leonard Carlisle was already there, and Rusty rode beside him. The herd moved with the precision of an infantry regiment, and Rusty cheerfully commented on the fact.

"These boys know how to handle cattle," he remarked. "Guess they'd ought to; they've likely stolen plenty."

Carlisle, mistaking Rusty's cheerfulness for an apology, chose the moment to unload the things he had been holding in his mind.

"Thieves!" he said bitterly. "They ought to be run out of camp."

"We'd be in poor shape without 'em," retorted Rusty. "I already run one bunch of thieves out of camp. Ain't that enough for you?"

"You had no proof that they were thieves," Carlisle flared. "I don't—"

"No proof?" Rusty demanded incredulously. "An' Honey Yates ready to kill you if you kept on pressin' him to take a count? Are you crazy, Carlisle?"

Carlisle did not answer. His position was not tenable, and he knew it. Still his anger, his animosity and his jealousy of Rusty Shotridge would not let him stop. "You've taken a whole lot on yourself," he said angrily. "You declared yourself. You set yourself up to boss this herd. Anything that happens is your responsibility, Shotridge! I still think that all this is useless, and that the trouble could have been avoided. I think those men were killed because of you. Their death is on your hands."

"Mine?" Rusty stared at Carlisle.

"Yours."

For a moment Rusty was silent. Then his voice came slowly. "I was havin' a little hope for you, Carlisle," he said. "I thought maybe you'd learn, but I guess you can't." The slow voice was weary now. "All right, it's my responsibility, an' I'll take it. I'll see this thing through."

"You'll have to," Carlisle said curtly. "And I'll have nothing to do with it. When we get to Dodge City I'll report your actions to Colonel Watrous and the proper authorities. I think all this trouble is of your making."

The accusation was so unreasonable, so untrue, that Rusty gasped. Carlisle was staring at him, his frown making harsh lines in his young face.

Rusty recovered and returned Carlisle's stare. "You do that," he drawled. "You run an' tell your story an' I'll tell mine. But along about tonight, Carlisle, when the trouble starts, don't come runnin' to me for help."

Carlisle flushed. "I don't intend to," he retorted. "And I don't intend to help. You've set yourself up as trail boss. You've hired a crew. It's up to you. From now on I'll have nothing to do with it.

I'll not work under your orders and I'll not—"

His voice broke off. Rusty had pushed his horse close and, reaching out, caught Carlisle's bridle reins. He bent forward until his face almost touched the other's.

"You'll take orders an' you'll work, he said flatly. "You've been tryin' to ride me; now I'll ride you awhile. The minute you don't do what I tell you, I'll set you afoot an' let you walk to Dodge City, an' if you try to use that gun you sport on me, I'll make you eat it. You'd better believe me, Carlisle."

Carlisle stared into gray-green eyes. Some of his anger drained away and was supplanted by a cold fear. Rusty had declared himself, and there was no disbelieving him.

"An' now you push the steers along," Rusty concluded, releasing the reins he held. "I promised to look after you, Carlisle, but I didn't know it was goin' to be such a chore. I didn't know how much of a fool you are!" With that he wheeled his horse and loped toward the steers, and after a moment Carlisle sullenly followed.

KANSAS took the herd straight on. Within an hour they saw the trees that marked the river, and now the thin stream of cattle was bent toward the west. The country lay, as Kansas had said, with its flatness broken by low knolls and little clumps of timber. The wagon was rolling along up the river toward the herd and the dust of the remuda showed ahead of the wagon.

Rusty watched Telesfor and the horses come out from behind a knoll and precede the cattle. He saw Kansas leave the point and lope across to the wagon. He saw Deems turn, drive a little farther, and stop. The point men had fallen off now, and the cattle drifted, their momentum not quite lost. Rusty left Carlisle to bring up the drag and loped ahead to join Kansas. As he rode, he noted that Deems had stopped the wagon close beside a motte of cottonwoods. Rusty nodded approvingly. Deems had used good judgment in selecting a place for a camp.

When he reached Kansas, Rusty could better see the conformation of river and land that lay ahead. Just as Kansas had informed him, there was a great tongue of land covering several hundred acres, circled by the river. Rusty grunted his satisfaction. There was a fence of water to hold the herd, and two riders on the neck of the tongue could prevent any drifting. Too, the grass was good and there were places where the steers could go down to water. It was a natural pasture and, even better, a natural fort, a strong defense position.

Kansas jerked his thumb toward the trees. "Good place for me an' the boys," he commented. "They'll see you an' come ridin' down. Maybe the shooting will run some steers into the river, but we dropped 'em far enough back so they'll have quite a ways to run. An' me an' the boys can come out about the right time an' sort of mix in from the side. That is, when they come."

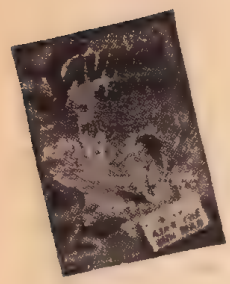
Rusty nodded. The plan of battle was set. "There's not any sense usin' half measures," he said. "This'll be the only time they'll be surprised an' we might as well make it a good one."

"Uh-huh." Kansas had the idea. Rusty wanted the battle carried through clear to the end. "Mebbe," the lanky man continued, "we can learn 'em enough this once so as they won't come to school again. That the way you want it?"

A TRIO OF HITS

Your three best bets in Comic Magazines

DOC SAVAGE COMICS



Frozen terror in the icy wastes of the polar regions . . . a mystery ship that disappeared . . . that's what Doc Savage and his five loyal pals found waiting for them in the northlands. And that's what helps make this new Doc Savage yarn a winner! Besides many other grand comic features.

SHADOW COMICS

The mayor of a small town dies — mysteriously, suspiciously—and the only clue to the puzzle is in a sealed box. And that's where The Shadow steps in, against desperate odds—in this **thirty-three** page spine-tingling yarn. More pages than any other comic story in the world . . . and other features as well.

SPORT COMICS

From the streets of Greenwich Village, Gene Tunney **fought** his way to fame. After he went to France as a marine for Uncle Sam, he climbed to the top—and retired, after the famous Dempsey fight, as undefeated heavyweight champ of all time. Now his main interest is helping boys . . . and there isn't a boy who can afford to miss this stirring true-life story. Told in brilliantly colored pages.

EACH 10 CENTS A COPY

AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

"That's the way I want it," Rusty agreed. "You'd better get gone now. Maybe some of 'em are watchin' us now from the timber. If they are, our surprise isn't goin' to be worth much."

Telesfor had brought in the horses and, seeing that the remuda was penned and that the cattle were grazing, every man of the Watrous crew headed for camp. There was very little talk as they changed horses. Rusty helped Telesfor hobble a few animals in the remuda, and then gave him orders to take the horses on, through the herd and well up into the tongue of land. He wanted the horses beyond the cattle. Horses were important.

Telesfor left on his errand while Nugget and Carlisle stayed in camp. Rusty rode out toward the west, stationing himself below the cattle. When he reached a vantage point and looked back, he could see only Carlisle, Deems and Nugget at the camp. The others had gone. Rusty's thoughts turned at once to Carlisle. He had to take care of him. The best and safest place for Carlisle would be in camp, he judged. When Nugget came out to join him, Rusty sent the old man loping back with orders to tell Carlisle that he was to stay with Deems.

All about the countryside the last sloping sunlight was dying. Shadows came crawling across the neck of land. The steers were grazing, heads lowered, jaws steadily cropping grass. Rusty looked at them. They were in better shape than when they had been received, heavier, in better flesh.

Rusty's horse lifted his head and, turning, stared intently toward a clump of timber some two hundred yards below the narrow neck where Rusty held position. Rusty followed the animal's interest, staring at the timber. For an instant he studied the clump of trees, and then reached back for his gun. A horse

came charging out of the timber, the rider bent low because of overhanging limbs. Other horses followed. The first rider straightened.

Rusty, gun out, lifted it and fired a shot in the air, a warning signal. Three men were coming straight toward him, their horses running full out. Three others were headed toward the camp. Rusty reined his horse around, his action automatic, until his right side was toward the approaching horsemen. Between Rusty and the three riders the gap closed rapidly. There was a crackle of gunfire, shrill yelling, the pound of running horses. The attack had come.

ACCURATE fire from a running horse is difficult, almost impossible. Honey Yates and the two men who followed him in his charge, found that to be true. They scored no hits as they came on, albeit the lead from their guns smacked harshly through the air all about the man who waited for them. Their strategy was at fault. Yates realized that suddenly. Himself a horseman, he had thought to attack on horseback. He would have done better if he had waited for darkness and come on afoot.

Rusty, too, was loath to sacrifice mobility for accuracy. But he was a more rapid thinker than Yates. As the distance closed he dismounted, his horse a barricade between himself and the onrushing riders. His strategy also was at fault. He had not thought that any attacking party would split. The split spoiled the surprise, made his hidden force less effective. There had been an error on both sides.

Rusty's horse, frightened, pulled back, jerked, and the rein Rusty held was gone. He crouched, leveled his gun, and pulled trigger. The shot had no result. One of the charging men swung wide and stopped his horse. Rusty saw him working at his weapon. Eagerness had made that man unload his pistol outside effective range.

Again Rusty aimed and fired. A horse, hit, swung wide and, stung by the slug, cold-jawed and bolted straight toward camp. There was no time for Rusty to see more, for Yates was upon him. Horse and man came on, intent to run Rusty down, to override him. Rusty dodged left, fired again, hurried his next shot and missed. One more shell in the Colt.

Yates turned his mount short, cutting back, bringing the horse around on its hind legs. Mighty good man with a horse, Rusty thought. Mighty good horse. His Colt, with one shell left, came up and bounced back as he pulled the trigger. He had estimated badly. His target, moving, had not come into line. Yates was standing in his stirrups, chopping down with the Colt in his hand.

Here it came, Rusty thought coolly. This was the end of Rusty Shotridge. But no flame spewed from the gun as it fell level. Rusty had a glimpse of Yates' face, a snarling mask of hate. Yates, too, had unloaded his gun; that last shot just wasn't there. Then Yates and his horse were gone and another rider took his place. Kansas, hat lost in the battle, body lying almost flat along his horse's neck, arm outthrust and tipped with steel, came charging past. Rusty flipped open the loading gate of his weapon and began to jack out spent shells. For a fleeting instant he had time to survey the battle.

But there was no battle. A riderless horse stood some small distance from the wagons. Another trotted

in an aimless circle down below the neck of land. There was a crashing in the timber below the neck that told of flight and pursuit. Beyond the camp a rifle chanted two harsh notes, paused in its song and spoke again. Rusty shoved shells into the cylinder of his gun, and looked around. His horse was twenty feet away, head up, anchored by a foot planted on a trailing rein. Rusty walked toward the animal.

"Whoa," he ordered. "Whoa, now!"

The horse surveyed Rusty's approach anxiously and tried to move. The rein came free and the animal walked off, trailing the reins. Rusty said, "Whoa," and, holding out his hand, tried to catch the reins. He did not see Ben Nugget until the latter appeared beside the loose horse and, reaching down, caught the reins that Rusty wanted.

"Here's yore horse," Nugget said as though this were an everyday occurrence. Rusty took the tendered reins, holstered his Colt, and mounted. In the saddle he turned toward the south again. Men were coming back from below the neck, converging upon him. Kansas came up and stopped. Chico, Gus and Red joined Kansas.

"You get hurt?" Rusty asked sharply.

"The doggoned trees like to beat me to death," Kansas answered. "I wasn't hurt. How about it, Chico?"

"No," Chico said.

"Yo're bleedin', Shotridge," Red announced. "They hit you."

RUSTY looked down at his left hand in surprise. There was blood flowing from his fingertips and his arm felt curiously numb. "I guess I am," he said slowly.

"They split on us an' that made it tough," Kansas drawled. "We taken care of the bunch that jumped the camp an' then come on. It made us a little slow. They was surprised all right. You better come along an' get that looked after, Shotridge."

"I'll do that," Rusty agreed.

Kansas rode beside him as they went to the camp. Nugget and Chico, Gus and Red rode together. They were just like a six-horse outfit, trailing to the camp, only there was no wagon behind them. Deems, his shotgun across his arm, met them at the wagon, and Carlisle, carrying a rifle, came walking down the slope toward the fire. Carlisle's face was white and strained in the firelight.

"Shotridge is hit," Kansas said, dismounting and stepping over beside Rusty. "Get out yore rags, Deems."

Chico climbed down from his horse and the others, too, dismounted. Carlisle had stopped beside the fire.

"I meant to tell you," Chico said to Carlisle, "that gun shoots a little high."

"I hit a man," Carlisle said, his voice curiously flat. "He's out there some place." He gestured toward the south. The dusk was closing in, night filling it.

"Let's look at that arm," Deems said.

Rusty, his shirt off and white torso exposed, looked curiously at his arm. There was a deep cut in the inner side of the biceps where a bullet had torn through. Deems doctored the cut with turpentine that burned like fire, and rags torn from a clean flour sack. Kansas was doing something around the back of the wagon. He joined Rusty and the group about him, carrying Deems' lantern.

"I'm goin' out an' take a look," he announced.

Chico and Red went with Kansas. Gus discovered that he had a bullet burn just above the knee on his left leg, and Deems transferred his attention to him.

Carlisle stood staring at Rusty. "I hit a man," he insisted. "He was riding off. I hit him." Carlisle's voice was rising in pitch. Rusty looked at him sharply, saw the hysteria in the youth's wild eyes, and took steps to prevent it.

"Maybe you did!" he said bleakly. "What of it? They come askin' for it. You an' Nugget get out an' watch the herd. Go on, now!"

The harshness of Rusty's voice, his gruffness, the hard command, lifted Carlisle from his depression. He glared angrily at Rusty, seemed about to refuse the order, and then turned abruptly toward his horse. Rusty spoke, low-toned, to Ben Nugget:

"Don't leave him alone. If he gets to talkin' snap him out of it. I'll be out in a minute."

Down below the camp the lantern was bobbing along. The firefly speck of light stopped, was hidden by a man's interposed body, and then appeared again, motionless.

"Come on, Carlisle," Nugget directed. "Let's go."

The young man mounted, and he and Nugget rode away. Gus, his leg bandaged, pulled up his overalls. Close by the wagon there was a sudden cracking sound and the men wheeled toward it. Gus took three steps and then stopped.

"Well, I'll be hornswoggled," he said, his voice incredulous. "My horse just fell over. "He was standin' there an' he just fell."

Going to the horse, Gus made a hurried examination and straightened. "Must've been the slug that grazed my left," he said. "It hit the horse an' he bled to death inside. First time a thing like that's happened to me."

AMERICA NEEDS SKILLED MEN!

TRAIN FOR A GOOD PAY JOB IN ELECTRICITY

ON REAL MOTORS, GENERATORS, ETC.

12 WEEKS' "Learn-By-Doing" Training

Where do you fit in today's gigantic defense program and industrial expansion? You CAN play an important part. Good-pay jobs will open up for thousands of TRAINED MEN. Now is the time to get YOUR training in Electricity—the mighty power that makes the whole program possible. **Electricity is absolutely essential to this program.** This means thousands of new jobs and opportunities for men who are properly trained to do electrical work. **This is your big opportunity.** Get ready NOW for your place in Electricity.

QUICKER, EASIER WAY

Here at Coyne you can get 12 weeks of practical shop training on real electrical machinery similar to that used in many defense factories. You learn airplane ignition, wind armatures, do house-wiring, learn power plant operation, etc. **I make it easy for you to learn.** You "Learn By Doing", not by books . . . not a correspondence course. You don't need previous experience or advanced education. Expert instructors guide your every step.

I'll Finance Your Training

I not only give you the RIGHT KIND OF TRAINING, but I go much further: **I make it easy to get that training NOW.** You can get Coyne training today even if you don't have a lot of money. You can **get your training first—then pay for it in 12 monthly payments starting 60 days after your training period ends.** If you need part-time work to help out with living expenses my employment department will help you get it. **Lifetime employment service after you graduate.**

GET MY STORY

Don't let lack of money keep you from sending the coupon NOW. My Big FREE Book is full of facts and photographs which tell all about Coyne training and what it can mean to YOU . . . how you can get this training NOW, and pay for it later. I want to send you this free book. I want you to know how Coyne has helped others and **how it can help you even if you don't have much money.** Send for all the facts. No obligation. No salesmen will call. Don't delay—Mail coupon today.

H. C. LEWIS, President **COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL**
500 S. Paulina St. Dept. 11-45 Chicago, Illinois

NOW Extra 4-Weeks' RADIO Course At No Extra Tuition Charge

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY

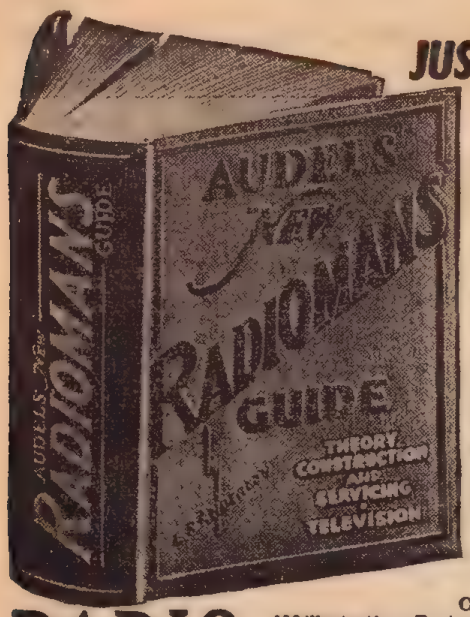
H. C. LEWIS, President, COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 11-45, Chicago, Ill.

Please send me your Big FREE Book and all the facts about Coyne, and tell me about your plans to help fellows like me get ahead.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....



EVERY RADIO MECHANIC —Service Man and Student Needs "Audels Radiomans Guide" Just Out! The whole subject of Modern Radio covering the Basic Principles—Construction and Operation—Service—Repairs—Troubles—All Easily Understood Over 750 Pages. 400 Illustrations. Parts and Diagrams—LATE TELEVISION DATA—Valuable for REFERENCE AND HOME STUDY

RADIO

$4 To get this practical information in handy form for yourself just fill in and mail coupon today.

COMPLETE • PAY ONLY $1 A MONTH! ←

THEO. AUDEL & CO., Publishers, 49 W. 23rd STREET, N. Y.
Mail AUDELS NEW RADIOMANS GUIDE for free examination. If O. K. I will send you $1 in 7 days; then remit $1 monthly until price of $4 is paid. Otherwise, I will return it.

Name_____

Address_____

Occupation_____

Reference_____ SS41

LAW **STUDY AT HOME**

Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training.

More Ability: More Prestige: More Money

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. Successful graduates in every section of the U. S. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 165-L, Chicago
A Correspondence Institution

New! Lifelike!

PHOTO-RINGS

NEWEST SENSATION! Send any snapshot or photo and we'll reproduce it in this beautiful onyx-like ring.

Special **48c**

Indestructible! Waterproof! (Hand-painted 10c extra)

Enclose strip of paper for ring size. Pay postman plus a few cents postage. If you send cash we pay postage. REX PHOTO RING CO., Dept. SS-5 P.O. Box 14, Cincinnati, O. (Canadians Send Money Orders)

Send for my 50c book, how to develop

STRONG Arms and Shoulders 25¢

with 20 full pages of illustrations, showing and fully describing exercises that will quickly develop, beautify and make you gain great strength in your Shoulders, Arms, Wrists, Hands and Fingers.

Without Any Apparatus

This is really a remarkable course of Physical Culture exercises. Don't fail to send for it NOW. 25c coin or 30c U. S. Stamps.

A. BARKER, (Studio SS,) 1235 Sixth Ave., N.Y.C.
Individual instruction at my Physical Culture studio, for Health and Strength.

"Lucky for you it was the horse," Deems said dryly.

The lantern was coming on, bobbing along from the south. Kansas and Red and Chico came up to the fire. Kansas set the lantern carefully on the ground.

"Two of 'em," he said soberly, reaching into his shirt pocket for tobacco and papers. "They're both dead. Carlisle was right, Shotridge. He hit one of 'em. I can tell the kind of hole a .38-55 makes."

"He can't," Rusty said significantly. "No use tellin' him. He's upset enough the way it is."

Kansas nodded. "Want to go see who they are?" he asked.

"I'll go in a minute," Rusty answered. "We'll have to do somethin' with 'em tonight. Tomorrow we can—" His voice trailed off. Kansas nodded. Tomorrow they could bury the bodies.

"Tomorrow," Chico announced abruptly, "I'm goin' to take a little pasear down south. Kind of look the country over. Mebbe I can—"

"You bloodthirsty little devil!" Kansas' voice was very matter-of-fact. "Tomorrow you'll stand a day herd on the steers, that's what you'll do."

Chico lapsed into sultry silence and Deems' voice cut in: "You git yore saddle off that dead horse, Gus. Some of the rest of you put ropes on him an' drag him off. He's too blasted near to my kitchen. Think anybody can sleep with a dead horse in the kitchen?"

"Think anybody can *sleep?*" Red retorted. "All right, Gus. I'll help you get yore saddle."

THERE was no sleep in the camp that night. Deems kept a pot of coffee on the fire. Carlisle and Nugget were relieved by Telesfor and Red. In turn Rusty and Kansas took a guard riding slowly, side by side, back and forth across the neck

of land that led to the tongue. Morning broke, blue and crimson, gold and gray, beautiful, unaffected by the evil of men. In the morning the camp stirred to activity.

There was much to be done. A day herd must be kept on the steers, but one man could attend to that detail. There was work for the others. Rusty put Carlisle on day herd, seeking to spare the young man's feelings. He had no compunction concerning the others. Salted and seasoned as they were, imbued with the philosophy that death and danger were a part of living, he used them as he would.

Graves were dug and blanket-wrapped bodies lowered into them. There were no other services, and Kansas remarked grimly that if a town ever was situated here at the river crossing it would have the advantage of a boothill already started. Gus' horse was dragged farther from the camp and the buzzards, scenting it, circled out of nowhere and settled down. And when these things were done, always with alert eyes scanning the southern country, Rusty, Kansas and Chico took fresh horses and rode.

For a time they had a trail to follow. Then that trail grew thinner and presently Rusty stopped.

"No use goin' any farther," he said. "We could mebbe run into 'em an' I don't want that. I think they'll let us alone awhile."

Kansas agreed. "They got a jolt," he said. "Likely it learned 'em. For now, anyhow. What's the program, Shotridge?"

"Stay where we are an' cross the river as soon as it goes down some," answered Rusty. "Let's go back now."

And that was the program. For the remainder of the day the men relieved each other on day herd, those who were free loafing around the camp, always with a watch kept toward the south. Nothing happened to break the peace. That night the guard rode back and forth across the narrow neck of land.

In the morning the day herding was resumed. By afternoon of the second day, Rusty, testing the stage of the water, rode Toughy into the ford and found it passable for horses and cattle. The wagon was another matter. Rusty returned to camp and for an hour or two the ringing of an ax resounded and men pulled cottonwood logs down to the river at the end of their saddle ropes. With the logs floated, other ropes were brought into play and the timbers were lashed together. Again saddle ropes were used and men pushed and tugged at wheels while the wagon was maneuvered into the water. Then, when it stood axle-deep the raft logs were brought and fastened to the axles. Three men swam their horses across, the saddle ropes, fastened together, making guy lines. The floating wagon was pushed from the bank and, secured by the guy lines, caught by the current, it swept downstream in a long arc and grounded in the shallows on the northern bank.

There was more work then, cutting down the bank with ax and spade to form a road for the wagon to follow to the top. Men sweated and strained and swore, and finally their purpose was accomplished. Wet through with river water and sweat, Rusty surveyed their accomplishment.

"Now we got to cross the cattle," he said. "Let's get at it."

So again the crew entered the river, only Joe Deems remaining on the northern bank. Once more

horses were changed, and then the riders pushed the cattle down from the tongue of land and, marching them along, swung in a great semicircle toward the ford. The steers were logy and unwilling, but the men were their masters.

The lead steers entered the river, splashed through the shallows and, reaching swimming water, forgot their loginess and headed for the opposite bank. This time there was no mill to turn them back. This time each man in the crew, working with precision and dispatch, was an efficient unit of the whole. Downstream on the farther bank, the cattle grounded and splashed out, and immediately fell to grazing until the whole herd was across.

It was not a difficult matter to cross the remuda, and when that was done every man felt relief. The Canadian was between them and danger.

"I feel," Kansas said, riding beside Rusty, "kind of like sayin' 'Thank God.' We're pretty near in Dodge City now."

Rusty looked at the river, and nodded. "Pretty near," he agreed.

"An' you'll be glad when you get there," Kansas commented, looking at his companion.

"Yeah," Rusty drawled. "I'll be glad. I'll be half finished when we get there."

Kansas' eyes were very sharp, but he said nothing more. Rusty Shotridge would be held done with his job when the steers reached Dodge City, but Kansas had an idea as to the other half of the work that the young trail boss had laid out for himself. Over by the wagons Joe Deems called:

"Come an' get it, you water dogs. Eat or I'll throw it out!"

CHAPTER XIII

NORTH TO TRINCHERA PASS

BUD SIGLOE, with a delivery date in Kansas that was not pressing, moved along toward the north by stops and starts, like a thermometer on a hot day. The Wichita held him for two days; the Clear Fork, running bank full, also retarded him, and the quicksand added to the delay. Ad Marble had bought stock cattle and Sigloe had a herd of two and three-year-old heifers bound to stock some range in the north. The heifers would not travel like steers. Being feminine and therefore notionate, they required careful handling. Bud's temper grew shorter by the moment, but he applied the old trailman's axiom: "He was hard on the men and horses and easy on the cattle."

The Red River was up. There was no crossing, and there were two herds already waterbound. Bud Sigloe threw off the trail and kept the heifers on good grass. He bought his men a box of cigars and a quart of whiskey when he restocked his wagon at the crossing store, and waited with what patience he possessed.

Time played its part and the water went down. One ambitious trail boss, mistaking valor for judgment, tried to cross before the stage of the water was right, and had a bad time, losing some cattle by drowning and a few head in the quicksand. Bud waited two days more and then, taking his turn, moved up to the river. Mitchell cut the herd for him, and after the few strays had been weeded out, gave Sigloe a warning.

"You'd better hang on the trail," the trail cutter advised. "Cut down as close to Camp Supply as you can. Ol' Eagle Claws an' his bucks are

cuttin' trail west of Supply an' from what I hear they're raisin' the devil."

"How do you mean?" Sigloe inquired, staring down the length of his short and pugnacious nose at the trail cutter.

"They're takin' beef," Mitchell amplified his original statement. "There's been a troop out from the fort tryin' to round him up, but so far they ain't had much luck. He dodges 'em. The gov'ment is behind on the beef ration, an' Eagle Claws is doin' what he can to make up for it. Word's come back that he's makin' the herds pay him off before he lets 'em through. That's what he's doin'. He's takin' a few beefs from every herd."

"He'll have trouble if he tries to take any from me," Sigloe snorted. "What does he think I'm runnin'? A granger outfit?"

Mitchell took a chew, proffered the plug to Bud, who refused it, got his tobacco under control, and spat thoughtfully. "It's better," the trail cutter said, "to give him a few head of cattle than to have him hangin' on clear across to the North Fork, raisin' Ned and stampedin' the herd. You know that, Sigloe."

Bud Sigloe did know that. A few runs would knock more tallow off a herd than any other thing. He simply could not afford to have his cattle choused, and so he would pay blackmail to the Comanche chief. He grunted, shook hands with Mitchell, and said, "Thanks."

"An' I got a message for you," Mitchell stated. "There was a feller with the Watrous outfit that went through here over a week ago. Feller named Shotridge. He said he'd be lookin' for you in Dodge an' that him an' Flanders would have the place all swept out an' peaceful for you when you go there." Mitchell grinned and Sigloe's bearded face cracked in appreciation and anticipation.

Not Expensive to Learn

SCIENTIFIC CRIME DETECTION

The Steady Pay Profession

Good Times—or Bad

"I will teach you Finger Print Identification — Firearms Indentification—Police Photography—and Secret Service!" That's what I told the men who now handle the good jobs listed in the column at the right. Give me a chance and I'll train YOU to fill an important position in the fascinating field of scientific crime detection.

Learn
FINGER PRINTING
*
FIREARMS IDENTIFICATION
*
POLICE PHOTOGRAPHY
*
SECRET SERVICE METHODS

I TRAINED THE MEN WHO THEN GOT THESE BIG JOBS

GET IN NOW!

But don't be misled. Scientific crime detection is not simple. It's a *science*—a *real* science, which requires very special training. I teach you this science so that you should be competent to do the work of a thoroughly trained employee in a bureau of identification, for the rest of your life. I give you something nobody can ever take from you.

LOOK AT THE RECORD!

47% of ALL Identification Bureaus in the United States are headed by our students and graduates. They have regular jobs—salaries—often collect reward money — and many of these men knew absolutely nothing about this work before they began their training with me.

FREE BLUE BOOK OF CRIME

This book is full of exciting information on scientific crime detection. It will show YOU how YOU, at a cost so low you shouldn't even think of it, can get started without delay. Don't wait. Clip coupon . . . send it NOW!

Here are a few of the 600 bureaus headed by our students and graduates.

STATE BUREAU OF DELAWARE
STATE BUREAU OF FLORIDA
STATE BUREAU OF MAINE
STATE BUREAU OF MICHIGAN
STATE BUREAU OF NEW MEXICO
STATE BUREAU OF RHODE ISLAND
STATE BUREAU OF SOUTH CAROLINA
STATE BUREAU OF TEXAS
STATE BUREAU OF UTAH
LINCOLN, NEBRASKA
CONCORD, N. H.
ALBANY, N. Y.
TRENTON, N. J.
CANTON, OHIO
TULSA, OKLA.
MOBILE, ALA.
PHOENIX, ARIZ.
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.
SEATTLE, WASH.

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Ave. Dept. 2771 Chicago, Ill.

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 2771, Chicago

Gentlemen: Without any obligation on my part, send me the "Blue Book of Crime," and complete list of 600 bureaus employing your graduates, together with your low prices and Easy Terms Offer. (Literature will be sent ONLY to persons stating their age.)

Name.....

Address.....

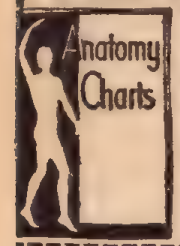
.....Age.....

Learn this Profitable Profession

. . in 90 Days at Home

Hundreds of men and women of all ages 18-50 make $10.00 to $20.00 in a single day giving scientific Swedish Massage and Hydro-Therapy treatments. There is a big demand from Hospitals, Sanitariums, Clubs, Doctors and private patients as well as opportunities for establishing your own office.

Learn this interesting money-making profession in your own home by mail, through our home study course. Same instructors as in our NATIONALLY KNOWN resident school. A diploma is awarded upon completion of the course. Course can be completed in 3 to 4 months. High School training is not necessary. Many earn big money while learning.



Anatomy Charts & Booklet FREE

Enroll now and we will include uniform coat, medical dictionary, patented reducing roller and Hydro-Therapy supplies without extra cost. The reducing course alone may be worth many times the modest tuition fee.

Send coupon now for Anatomy Charts and booklet containing photographs and letters from successful graduates. These will all be sent postpaid—FREE.

THE College of Swedish Massage
Dept. 394, 30 E. Adams St., Chicago.
You may send me FREE and postpaid, Anatomy Charts, booklet containing photographs and letters from graduates, and complete details of your offer.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

IF I Send YOU THIS FINE SUIT—

Will You Wear It and Show It to Friends?

I need a reliable man in your town to wear a fine made-to-measure, all-wool DEMONSTRATING SUIT—advertise my famous Union clothing—and take orders. You can make up to $12.00 in a day. My line contains over 150 quality woolens, all sensational values, guaranteed.

CASH IN ON PARTIAL PAYMENT PLAN

You need no experience or money. I supply everything required FREE. Write me today for FREE details.

STONEFIELD, 1300 W. Harrison, Dept. N-952, Chicago

READY CASH
HOT POTATO CHIPS

Here's your chance—a money-making business of your own. Turn potatoes into newest kind of Potato Chips with my improved outfit. Makes delicious Chips at low cost. A few hours practice does it. Begin anywhere—city, village, town. Potatoes cheap and plentiful. Wholesale or retail. Steady year 'round business. Groceries, markets, restaurants, taverns do the retailing for you.

Start Your Own Business

Great quantities of Chips are eaten daily. Profit large—unusually so. You can start this money-making business on a SMALL outlay of cash. Write for Potato Chip Booklet.

LONG-EAKINS CO., 140-S High St., Springfield, Ohio

"He'll do it, too," the trail boss announced. "All swept out an' clean, he said?"

"That's right."

"Then," Sigloe drawled, "I'd better be gettin' on before somebody gets it dirty again. So long."

Mitchell grinned and said "so long," and Bud Sigloe loped off after his traveling cattle.

VETERAN that he was, Sigloe took some precautions following Mitchell's warning. Cale Minnitree and Pat Moran, relics of many a drive to the north, were removed from active duty with the heifers and dispatched ahead to scout the country. Two days north of the river they returned to the herd with information. They had seen Eagle Claws' wickiups on a creek perhaps ten miles to the north, and they were sure that the chief would be on deck when the herd came up.

Bud Sigloe put a man to night-wrangling horses, had a few more hobbled when the remuda was turned out that evening, and announced a new division of the guards, putting on an extra man and stretching the hours of watching.

Nothing happened during the night, and the following morning the herd moved on. They were not molested during the day. Not until the cattle were going to the bed ground Bud had chosen did Eagle Claws appear. Then ten Indians—most of them fat; all of them dirty and unkempt—came riding down toward the cattle. Sigloe, reinforced by Minnitree and Moran, went to meet them.

Most Comanches talked Spanish. Their raids into Mexico were not far in the past, and the younger bucks learned Spanish, as they learned their own language, at their mothers' breasts. Both parties stopped and one of the Indians, detaching himself from his companions,

came forward. Sigloe also left his men and rode to meet the brave.

There was grease upon Eagle Claws' braids, his face, his fat body and the scanty buckskin that covered it. He rode a pinto decked with a lion skin as a saddle, and across his thighs he carried a Winchester of the latest model. Bud discounted the Winchester. He knew that it was fouled, had probably never been cleaned after use, and was about as accurate as a slingshot. The two men met, stopped, surveyed each other, and Eagle Claws said: "How?"

"*Como esta?*" Bud replied.

That established the ground of a common language. Eagle Claws waved a plump and greasy hand toward the heifers and bluntly stated his errand. This was his country, he announced; the cattle were using his grass. He demanded payment. Ten head of heifers.

With difficulty Bud restrained his anger; he would part with no ten head of heifers to any Indian. But he did not tell Eagle Claws that. Instead he gestured toward the wagon, camped now below the cattle, and smoothly invited Eagle Claws to come to camp. Eagle Claws beckoned to his waiting warriors, and they came up. Minnitree and Moran joined the caucus. Was there, Eagle Claws wished to know, whiskey in the camp?

There was no whiskey.

Then why go? The savage diplomat shook his head. He would settle for ten head of heifers and not visit with his friend. Some men who drove cattle through his country had encountered much bad luck. He hoped that it would not dog the heels of this, his friend.

Bud Sigloe tapped his chest. "*Lo soy 'Bud Tejano,'*" he announced.

Eagle Claws' face remained blank, but his eyes shifted nervously. Sigloe had given the name that the Comanches called him. Several Indians, attempting to run a blazer on Sigloe-bossed herds, had encountered much difficulty. "Bud Tejano" was something of a conjure word along the trail.

Eagle Claws turned and spoke to his followers, employing Comanche for the dialogue. The nine greasy bucks trailed off and Eagle Claws politely said that he would visit Bud Tejano in his camp.

When they reached camp Eagle Claws, as was his right, chose to sit down. For this purpose he selected Cale Minnitree's unrolled bed. Sigloe's cook made coffee and the Comanche drank three cups, each heavily sweetened with molasses. He discoursed solemnly with Bud for a time and then, mounting his pinto, took his departure.

"You hold the remuda between the camp an' the herd tonight," Bud instructed his horse wrangler. "Hobble 'em like last night an' we'll take the same guards. What you doin', Cale?"

"Huntin' an ant hill," Minnitree growled. He held his blankets gingerly in his hands and his eyes searched the ground about the camp. "That doggoned Injun set on 'em. I ain't goin' to take any chances on gettin' lousy. I'm goin' to stake these blankets over a ant hill an' let the ants have the lice."

"An' sleep with me, I reckon," Moran grunted with pretended annoyance. "Well, dang it, if you do, you got to stay quiet an' not turn like a pin wheel the way you done the last time.

AGAIN the guard on the herd was doubled and the remuda, held between camp and herd, had a night wrangler to care for it. Apparently

the precautions were not necessary, for the night was peaceful. In the morning Eagle Claws turned up at the camp, again accompanied by his braves. He smiled greasily at Bud Sigloe, and gestured to a brave. Eagle Claws wanted to trade.

It was a matter of face saving, Sigloe knew. The Comanche did not want to let a herd go through without payment of toll. But he did not want to tangle with Bud Tejano. Accordingly he had taken this route out of his difficulty. The buck that Eagle Claws beckoned came up and dumped two hides on the ground. These were fairly fresh and had not yet attained the flintlike hardness characteristic of hides. Eagle Claws entered into a monologue. He would trade the hides for two heifers. They were good hides.

"Cale," Sigloe called. "You an' Pat cut that crippled YH heifer out an' drive her over here." The order given, he turned to Eagle Claws again. Reputation and actions had won Bud Sigloe through. He could trade the crippled heifer for the hides and everyone would be satisfied.

"*Una vaca,*" Sigloe said, holding up one finger.

When Minnitree and Moran came back with the heifer, the trade was made. Eagle Claws, his dignity satisfied and his reputation secure, gestured to his braves, and the heifer was driven away. Cale Minnitree, curious as to who had lost the cattle from which the hides had been taken, opened the rolls and looked for the brands. Sigloe came over to join him.

"LM," announced Minnitree. "Didn't Watrous have the LM steers?"

"Yeah," Sigloe growled. "Looks like McBride has run into some trouble."

"I didn't know that Watrous trail-branded a Hackamore," Minnitree commented. "Look here. They skinned out the heads when they took the hides, an' there's a Hackamore across the nose of this one."

Sigloe bent down and examined the mark, then straightened without examining the other hide. "Roll 'em up an' throw 'em in the possum belly on the wagon," he ordered. "We got to get goin'. That damned Eagle Claws has killed half a day for us."

Minnitree rolled the hides, and Sigloe, mounting, trotted out toward his herd. He hoped that when the Watrous outfit had lost those cattle they hadn't lost anything else: say, a rusty-haired, gray-eyed young man.

"I bet you," Bud Sigloe muttered as he rode, that if the kid had been bossin' that outfit they wouldn't have lost no cattle at all. I'll bet on that!"

Minnitree loped up beside his boss. "Funny," he said, "there wasn't no Hackamore trail brand on that other hide. I looked for it an' it wasn't there."

Bud Sigloe paid no attention. Up ahead the cattle were moving. Bud lifted in his stirrups and swung his hat around his head to attract attention. He wanted the cattle pointed a little more east.

SOME twenty-five miles north and west of Bud Sigloe's heifers, there were other men discussing hides and stolen cattle. Honey Yates and Slippery Smith stood beside the wagon and glared at each other. Yates had made a demand and Slippery Smith was in the process of refusing it.

"I tell you," snarled Yates, "I didn't know them fellows was with Shotridge. If I'd known we'd have done it different. We've helped you

brand the steers you got; now I want horses. I'm goin' to take another try at him."

"Not with my men or my horses," Smith said decisively. "He's too many for you, Honey. Look what happened. You went up there with five men. You jumped him. He was fixed an' waitin' for you. You got two men killed an' another shot all to hell. I ain't goin' to loan you no more horses, an' I need my boys to handle my cattle. Besides, Shotridge and his bunch are across the Canadian by now an' you couldn't do nothin' with 'em. Hang it, they ought to be pretty near in Kansas by now."

Honey Yates made a sudden, violent gesture. All the things that Slippery Smith said were true, and he knew it. The knowledge did not soothe his injured feelings. He took a step toward Slippery and, as he moved, his hand rose swiftly. From the tail gate of the wagon a man spoke sharply.

"Hold it!"

Yates stopped. Under his mustache Smith's lips curled contemptuously.

"You think I'd take a chance on you, Honey?" he drawled. "Hell, no! Sam's been watchin' ever since you braced me. Yo're all done, Honey. Yo're washed up. You get funny an' Sam'll kill you right here."

The anger drained out of Yates, leaving him deflated. He dropped his hand from his weapon and his eyes lowered. Smith's voice went on, coldly distainful: "That's my gun yo're wearin'. You can shuck it off. Sam'll take it."

Mechanically Yates' hand lifted to his belt buckle. The gun and belt thudded down around his feet. Master of the situation, Smith spoke again:

"You set up to be a gunman," he drawled, contempt in his voice. "You wouldn't make a pimple on a gun-

★ ★

Omnibus of THRILLS!

★

Four book-length novels—four novelettes—by such famous detective-story authors as Cornell Woolrich, Steve Fisher, Cleve Adams and other top writers.

Selected by—Frank Gruber—winner in the Mary Roberts Rinehart prize contest and author of the best sellers THE LAUGHING FOX and THE FRENCH KEY.

Plenty of swell illustrations—a fine, heavy-paper cover that will stay fresh on your library shelf—and no advertising at all in this 8½ x 11, 160-page thrill-omnibus.

The price of this four-star annual is as amazing as its action-packed contents—only twenty-five cents. Imagine . . . one hundred and fifty thousand thrilling, chilling words in one volume. Go to your dealer today and get your copy—it's the best value in ace detective fiction on the market. If your dealer can't supply you, fill out coupon below.

DETECTIVE STORY ANNUAL

25 cents

STREET & SMITH
79 Seventh Avenue
New York City

Inclosed is 25c. Please send me the DETECTIVE STORY ANNUAL.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

man's nose. You want to jump Shotridge again. Man, I'm savin' yore life. You wouldn't even have a saddle an' bed if he hadn't felt sorry for you an' left 'em stacked when he pulled out."

Yates continued to stare at the ground. Smith, having waited a moment, continued. "If you don't like it here, you can pull out. I'll stake you to a horse. I'll do that for you."

Still Yates said nothing. Smith grunted, one short, harsh bark. "Nothin' like losin' yore nerve," he sneered. "If you don't want to pull out, you can go on north with me. I'll cut you in like the rest of the boys, I'm that generous. You helped run a Hackamore on them LM steers we got when we stampeded. Yo're entitled to somethin'. What do you say, Honey?"

Slowly Yates nodded. He did not lift his eyes. Smith grinned sardonically. "An' we won't go to Dodge City," he amplified. "I'll save yore life again. If we went to Dodge an' you run into Shotridge, he'd kill you. So we'll turn west an' go over to the Goodnight trail. We'll hit Trinchera Pass an' go into Colorado. We'll sell out up there some place an' you can go on to Canada. You ought to be safe up there."

Abruptly Smith turned and strode away. Sam came from his position at the wagon end, stooped and gathered up the fallen belt and weapon.

"You won't be needin' these, Honey," Sam drawled. "I'll take care of 'em for you." He, too, strode away. It was not until he was gone that Honey Yates lifted his head. His eyes, blue and inflamed, red-rimmed, glared at Slippery Smith's broad back.

"I'll go with you," Honey Yates muttered deep in his throat, so low that the words did not carry, "all the way to Colorado. I'll go all the way to hell with you, Slippery Smith. An' sometime I'll get a gun an' the deck won't be stacked. Then we'll see."

Slippery Smith turned. He looked at Yates and the latter lowered his eyes again. "If yo're goin' on with us," Smith drawled, "you'd better go get a horse from the remuda. It's time you started makin' a hand an' earnin' yore keep, Honey."

CHAPTER XIV

GUN-BACKED QUARANTINE

THERE is a difference between handling cattle when the crew is divided and when it acts as a unit. Leonard Carlisle sensed that difference as day followed peaceful day. Of all the men who accompanied the Watrous herd, only he himself was out of step. The others were compact, tightly knit; a force driven by one directing influence. Rusty Shotridge was that influence and Kansas and Red, Chico and Gus, Ben Nugget and Telesfor, even Joe Deems, were simply adjuncts to the trail boss. As the weeks grew older, Carlisle came to wish that he too were of the group, but he could not bring himself to join it. It is doubtful that the others would have allowed him to join had he tried.

There was in Rusty that combination of iron nerve, self-respect and friendliness which, coupled with ability, makes the born leader of men. The crew, from Telesfor on to Kansas, the top hand, liked Rusty, were his friends and yet respected him. Not that his actions held him aloof from the rest, it was simply that he was the boss and they the hands. Carlisle was not given to self-analysis. Had he been he might

have seen his errors and departed from them. Sensing Rusty's leadership, jealous of it, resentful of it and yet perforce bowing to it, Leonard Carlisle was not happy.

His own inadequacy was borne home to him now, brought keenly to his notice. Where before Honey Yates had been a buffer, had by word and deed inflated Carlisle's ego, now the men who were his daily associates took it for granted that he could not do those things that they did as a matter of course. He was not a full hand. His associates knew it and acted accordingly. And in this they, as well as Rusty, were unfair.

It might have been that under happier circumstances Rusty would have acted differently. Under other conditions he would have helped Carlisle, given him quiet, unobtrusive instructions and brought him along. But this was not possible. Carlisle had flared up, challenged Rusty's leadership, made unfair accusations, and Rusty could not forget that.

On the other hand Carlisle remembered Rusty's threat; felt that he had been neglected, that his position as part owner of the steers had been slighted; and, too, he could not forget that scene on the porch of the Stockman Hotel when Ellen Watrous had kissed Rusty. The memory rankled. The trip begun in anger, inspired by a desire to free himself from his sister's dominance, now came to be a grim journey, a task that must be finished.

Left to himself, without companionship other than the casual words which were spoken to him by the trail hands, Leonard Carlisle brooded. He forgot that it was his

AMAZING COMBINATION OFFER

THIS BEAUTIFUL DESK FOR ONLY 1.00 WITH ANY REMINGTON PORTABLE TYPEWRITER

A beautiful desk in a neutral blue-green—trimmed in black and silver—made of sturdy fibre board—now available for only one dollar (1.00) to purchasers of a Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable Typewriter. The desk is so light that it can be moved anywhere without trouble. It will hold six hundred (600) pounds. This combination gives you a miniature office at home. Mail coupon today.

THE COMBINATION FOR AS LITTLE AS 10c A DAY

How easy it is to pay for this combination. Just imagine! A small good will deposit and terms as low as 10c a day to get this combination at once. You will never miss 10c a day. Become immediately the possessor of this combination. You assume no obligation by sending the coupon.

THESE EXTRAS FOR YOU

LEARN TYPING FREE

To help you even further, you get Free with this special offer a 44-page booklet, prepared by experts, to teach you quickly how to typewrite by the touch method. When you buy a Noiseless you get this free Remington Rand gift that increases the pleasure of using your Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable. Remember, the touch typing book is Free while this offer holds.

SPECIFICATIONS

ALL ESSENTIAL FEATURES of large standard office machines appear in the Noiseless Deluxe Portable—standard 4-row keyboard; back spacer; margin stops and margin release; double shift key; two color ribbon and automatic reverse; variable line spacer; paper fingers; makes as many as seven carbons; takes paper 9.5" wide; writes lines 8.2" wide, black key cards and white letters, rubber cushioned feet.

SPECIAL CARRYING CASE

The Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable is light in weight, easily carried about. With this offer Remington supplies a beautiful carrying case sturdily built of 3-ply wood, bound with a special Dupont Fabric.

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE

The Remington Noiseless Deluxe Portable Typewriter is sold on a trial basis with a money-back guarantee. If, after ten days trial, you are not entirely satisfied, we will take it back, paying all shipping charges and refunding your good will deposit at once. You take no risk. Send coupon at once.

SEND COUPON NOW

Remington Rand Inc., Dept. 108-1
465 Washington St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Tell me, without obligation, how to get a Free Trial of a new Remington Noiseless Deluxe Portable, including Carrying Case and Free Typing Booklet. Also about your 10c a day plan. Send Catalogue.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

MECHANICS

KNOW YOUR CAR

New Fluid Drive Fully Explained!

You Need this Book

JUST OUT!

Ask to See it!

Every operator and mechanic needs AUDELS NEW AUTO GUIDE. This book saves time, money and worry. Highly endorsed. It presents the whole subject of auto mechanics: 1—Basic principles, 2—Construction, 3—Operation, 4—Service, 5—Repair. Easily understood. Over 1500 pages—1540 illustrations showing inside views of modern cars, trucks and buses with instructions for all service jobs. Diesel Engines fully treated, fully illustrated. **To Get This Assistance for Yourself Simply Fill in and Mail Coupon Today.**

$4 COMPLETE • PAY ONLY $1. A MONTH

THEO. AUDEL & CO., 49 WEST 23rd STREET, NEW YORK

Please send me postpaid AUDELS NEW AUTOMOBILE GUIDE ($4) for free examination. If I decide to keep it, I will send you $1 within 7 days; then remit $1 monthly until purchase price of $4 is paid. Otherwise, I will return it to you promptly.

Name .....

Address .....

Occupation .....

Reference SS41

$1.98

5 YEARS Guarantee.

This 5 year Guaranteed American made 16 size solid gold effect case, with locomotive design back, watch C.O.D. $1.98. Biggest bargain offered. Two tone simulated gold dial. Sunk second dial. Finely tested quick train lever movement. If you order two we give you one FREE. Agents Wanted. Order TODAY. Pay price plus postage on delivery. Money Back Guarantee.

WINEHOLT CO. Box W22 Woodbine, Penna.

MAN WANTED

HANDLE ONE OF OUR BIG PAY ROUTES

Sell to Stores on New Plan

Carry a complete "Wholesale Supply House" in your hand. Let us start you making Big Money in permanent business of your own. Show Storekeepers in every business how to DOUBLE profits on Nationally Advertised Goods. Over 200 Products. No experience needed. We supply everything. Free Book gives amazing facts.

World's Products Co., Dept. 61-G, Spencer, Ind.

HOME-STUDY BUSINESS TRAINING

Your opportunity can never be bigger than your preparation. Prepare now and reap the rewards in earlier and larger success. *Free 48-Page Books Tell How.* Write *now* for book you want, or mail coupon with your name and address in margin *today.*

- ☐ Higher Accountancy
- ☐ Modern Salesmanship
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Law: Degree of LL.B.
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Mgm't
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Stenotypy
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Credit and Collection Correspondence
- ☐ Modern Foremanship
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
- ☐ C. P. A. Coaching
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Effective Speaking

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A Correspondence Institution

DEPT. 165-R CHICAGO

own desire, his own jealousy, his own anger that had placed him where he was. Spoiled all his life, a leader in his own group at school, dominated by his sister since his infancy, Leonard Carlisle was not equipped to solve his present problems. It was natural that his unhappiness, his jealousy and his hatred should center on one man. Rusty Shotridge became the focus of all these things, the evil genius that had brought Carlisle to a realization of his own shortcomings.

And there was nothing that he could do. His brooding, resolving into hatred, could find no outlet. There was no one to whom he could talk, and so rid his mind of his troubles. There was no chance for action that would free his pent-up emotions. Had Carlisle rebelled against the trail boss, had he sought to vent his hatred upon Rusty, the men who moved the cattle would have killed him. Carlisle sensed it, felt it, knew it.

Yet, beneath all his resentment and hate there was an innate fairness in Carlisle. He told himself that his present predicament was all Rusty's fault; that the shortage of the herd, the fact that there were now two thousand in place of twenty-five hundred steers, was because of Rusty; that the reason they were shorthanded, that the necessity for constant watchfulness, was due to Rusty. These things he thought and forced himself to believe, and yet he knew they were not true.

As the herd moved on, north of the Canadian, the Kansas line growing closer as each day ended, Leonard Carlisle was heated in the fire that dwelt within himself, forged on the anvil of circumstances by the hammer of his own nature. From that furnace and by that forging something must be made. Carlisle did not realize, and could not know what type of man would emerge at the end of the trail.

RUSTY was too occupied to give a great deal of thought to Carlisle. The daily problems that confronted him took all his attention. There was at first the constant fear of attack. Then, as that dimmed, other problems took its place. Rusty, too, was finding himself. For the first time in his life all the responsibility was his own.

Daily there was the problem of the cattle, daily the problems of route, of water, of bed ground, the thousand and one things that confronted a trail boss. And Rusty had never before been solely responsible, had always, until now, been able to fall back upon more mature judgment. He, too, was being forged by the trail and gradually his patience grew and his temper became less touchy and more amenable to control. Rusty Shotridge, like Leonard Carlisle, was growing into a man.

So the miles went by and the camps were made and deserted, and the bed grounds one by one were left behind. And now, striking the trail again, finding daily the evidences of other herds that had preceded them, they came at last to the Kansas line and the last stage of their journey. And, two days' drive above that line, they encountered the last difficulty, the last barrier erected against them.

They camped that second day above the line, beside a creek that ran toward the east. The cattle were bedded on a slope above the creek and the remuda, between the herd and the wagon, grazed in the lush grass of the creek bottom. There was peace all about them, and Rusty was beginning to feel the letdown of tension that comes to any man as the completion of a task draws near. He was squatted beside the wagon, his plate balanced on his knees, talking to Kansas.

"Visitors comin'," Kansas announced.

Rusty looked up. Kansas and his three companions were gathering close beside the wagon. Down the slope, coming past the cattle, there were two men riding toward the camp. Rusty hastily took the last bite from his plate, swallowed the last gulp of coffee from his cup and stood up. As the riders came closer to the camped wagon, Rusty walked out to meet them.

•

THE newcomers were bearded men and curiously unalike. One wore bib overalls, a black hat and his feet were covered by heavy shoes. The other plainly was a cowman. Lee Farrel was the cowman's name, and he introduced his companion as Joel Peters. They dismounted at Rusty's invitation and walked over to the wagon. Rusty gestured toward the coffeepot and suggested that supper was just finished, but that there was plenty left.

"We've ate," Farrel announced. "Thanks."

The silence was awkward. Kansas, Red, Chico and Gus were not in evidence. Rusty could see them riding out toward the herd to relieve Nugget and Carlisle. Save for Deems and the visitors, Rusty was alone in the camp. It was never the young man's way to be backward.

"You got somethin' on yore minds?" he asked directly.

Farrel and Peters exchanged glances and Peters, clearing his throat, said: "Yo're bound through to Dodge City?"

"That's a fact," Rusty said.

Peters cleared his throat again. "There's crops planted north of here," he announced. "They're fenced. You can't go through that way."

Rusty studied Peters' face. "Well," he said reasonably, "there's got to be some way through. All the country isn't fenced, is it?"

It was Farrel who now took up the tale. "Peters is representin' the farmers," he said shortly. "They've had some trouble with herds this season. There's been some fence pulled down an' some wheat stomped out."

"I'm not interested in pullin' down fence," Rusty assured him. "My steers do well enough on grass, so I don't pasture 'em on wheat. I won't bother your fence line, Mr. Peters. You tell me a route that'll take me by you an' I won't come any place near."

Peters nodded, but Farrel's face was sober. "That's where I come in, Shotridge," he announced. "I got range west of the farms, an' me an' the rest that are usin' that country have set up a quarantine."

"A quarantine?" Rusty asked incredulously. "But look here, there's been herds through here before this one. How'd they get by?"

"That's what I'm tryin' to tell you," Farrel explained patiently. "Along about two months ago a Texas herd come through that was loaded with ticks. They dropped off the Texas cattle an' started tick fever on our range. Natchully it was bad, so we set up this quarantine. We had some trouble, an' the next cattle that come up the trail was stopped. They turned east an' broke through the farmers' fences an' tromped out their wheat an' went on. Now the stockmen an' the farmers got together, an' we're goin' to hold any Texas cattle that come up below Kaw Creek here, until frost comes. We can't have tick fever spread, an' we ain't goin' to have the fences tore down."

Rusty looked at his visitors. There was utter sincerity on their faces. He had to believe them, and he had to believe that they were honest. This was no holdup, engineered by men who would exploit the trail drivers. This was the real thing.

"We're hopin' that we won't have trouble," Farrel said slowly. "That's why Peters an' me come down here. But if we do have trouble we're fixed to take care of it."

"But I've got a delivery date to make at Dodge," protested Rusty. "There's herds behind me that have delivery dates, too. What about them?"

"We ain't goin' to have tick fever on our ranges," Farrel persisted doggedly.

"An' we ain't goin' to have no more cattle go through our fields." Peters' voice was iron hard.

"There's no ticks on these cattle," Rusty said triumphantly. "This herd don't come from the tick country. They're clean. They aren't—"

"We're sorry for you, but that's the way it stands: All Texas cattle stay below the line," Farrel interrupted.

"How far west does this quarantine run?" Rusty asked.

"It goes pretty near to the Colorado line," answered Farrel.

Rusty shook his head. "You can't make it stick," he said flatly. "You're goin' to have to let trail cattle through. Why—"

"There's about five hundred men that are ready to make it stick," Farrel broke in, his tone blunt.

"But isn't there some way—"

"There might of been a week ago." Farrel's bearded face was hard. "There ain't now. We wanted to make a lane for the first herd that come through, but the trail boss wouldn't listen to us. He said that the country had always been open,

an' he was goin' to keep it that way. We wasn't organized. My son-in-law was killed. There ain't no way open now, an' there won't be till after frost."

Carlisle, relieved at the herd by Kansas and the others, had ridden up and dismounted. He had overheard the last portion of the talk. Now he entered it.

"These are my cattle," he announced. "We've got a delivery date to keep in Dodge City. We've got to go through."

Farrel looked at him and shrugged. "You ain't goin' through," he said flatly. "I've told you. Come on, Joel."

Peters looked unhappily at Rusty, glanced at Carlisle and, turning, followed his companion to where their horses stood. Wordlessly both men mounted and rode away without a backward glance. Rusty stood watching them, and when they were out of sight, turned to look at Leonard Carlisle. The young man was smiling.

"Can you get around that, Shotridge?" he challenged. "Can you?"

AS always, Rusty met Carlisle's antagonism with rising anger. Carefully he held himself in check. "Do you think you could go through, Carlisle?" he demanded.

Here was a counter challenge. Carlisle felt it and, suddenly, an idea came into his mind. Here was a thing that Rusty could not break, could not handle. But Carlisle could handle it. He was sure that he could. Now he would prove his superiority. Now he would show this gray-eyed man who stared at him so coolly that he, Leonard Carlisle, was capable.

"I'll wait until you fall down," Carlisle said complacently. "Then I'll get the herd through."

Rusty bristled. His temper was gone, lost before Carlisle's cool ef-

Look! I Send You FOODS, SOAPS, ETC. WORTH $6.00 FREE!

MY OFFER IS AMAZING

Yes—absolutely FREE! $6.00 worth of actual full size packages of famous Zanol Food, Grocery, and Household Products! I make this exciting offer to every man and woman who wants to earn money in spare or full time taking orders for more than 200 necessities. Don't wait. Rush your name and address today and don't send one penny. Nothing to pay us for these products now or any time.

MAKE MONEY EASY WAY
NO EXPERIENCE—SPARE TIME

Thousands of men and women everywhere are earning welcome cash easily with my vast line of Home Needs—Coffee, Tea, Spices, Toilet Articles, Soaps, etc. Even without experience you can MAKE MONEY as my Dealer in your town.

I equip you fully with actual products FREE to try and show—and even give you liberal credit. Just see your friends and neighbors with my thrilling values and Premium Offers, amazing 1c Sales, and other Bargain Specials.

SEND NO MONEY!

Just write today—now—and say you want to make money for yourself with Zanol Food and Household Products. That's all! Get my big assortment of $6.00 worth of actual full size products FREE! Send no money. But write me TODAY.

ZANOL, 3673 Monmouth, Cincinnati, O.

START
$1260 to $2100 YEAR

Men—Women
Thousands appointments each year
Prepare NOW for 1941 Examinations
32 Page Civil Service Book
Mail Coupon Today—SURE

COUPON

Franklin Institute
Dept. M194
Rochester, N. Y.

Gentlemen: Rush to me FREE of charge, list of U. S. Government big pay jobs. Send me FREE 32-page book describing salaries, vacations, hours and work. Tell me how to qualify for one of these jobs.

Name .....

Address .....

LATEST SCIENTIFIC CRIME DETECTION METHODS

Read This Amazing Book
30 DAYS FREE

Explains with real cases latest methods of Scientific Crime Detection—finger printing—fire-arms identification—police photography. Takes you on the inside. Informative—exciting—valuable. Read 30 days free—then send only a dollar if you want to keep this amazing book. Your age must be stated.
T. G. Cocke, Dept. 2771, 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago

High School at Home

Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Equivalent to resident school work—prepares for entrance to college. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diplomas awarded. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. *Single subjects if desired.* Free Bulletin on request.
American School, Dept. H-17, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

Lemon Juice Recipe Checks • Rheumatic Pain Quickly

If you suffer from rheumatic or neuritis pain, try this simple inexpensive home recipe. Get a package of Ru-Ex Compound, a two week's supply, mix it with a quart of water, add the juice of 4 lemons. Often within 48 hours—sometimes overnight—splendid results are obtained. If the pains do not quickly leave you, return the empty package and Ru-Ex will cost you nothing to try. It is sold under an absolute money-back guarantee. Ru-Ex Compound is for sale by drug stores everywhere.

AMAZING CHEAP OIL BURNER

WHY COOK OR HEAT With COAL or WOOD

Quick intense heat at turn of valve—no dirt, ashes or drudgery. Burns ordinary low priced free flowing oil—no clogging up. **GUARANTEED.**

Slips into Any STOVE, RANGE or FURNACE.

SENT ON TRIAL Prove its efficiency, convenience and economical operation. Write for **SPECIAL OFFER** to agents who will demonstrate and take orders. Wonderful money-maker, spare or full time. Write quick—a postal card will do.
UNITED FACTORIES, A-104 Factory Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

I Have Special Work for HOUSEWIVES who need up to $22 A WEEK!

No Canvassing
No Experience
No Investment
Necessary!

If you need $22.00 in a week—if you want a beautiful selection of the latest Spring and Summer Styles for yourself absolutely Free of extra charge—all without house-to-house canvassing, experience, or investment, even without interfering with your household duties, write me at once giving your dress size and age. Nothing to pay now or at any time. **Harford Frocks, Inc., Dept. S-252, Cincinnati, Ohio.**

frontery. "You won't have to take 'em through!" Rusty said curtly. "I'll get along without yore help."

"By killing another man or two, I suppose?" Carlisle drawled. "I don't think you can do it, Shotridge. Not this time. There are too many of them and there's law in Kansas."

Rusty opened his mouth to retort, thought better of it and, wheeling, strode to his horse. Untying the animal, he mounted and trotted out toward the cattle.

Kansas and his three friends were bunched beside the cattle. Rusty stopped and, as always, looked at the herd. They were spread out, each big steer with a little space about him. Some were lying down, peacefully chewing their cuds. Others were still on their feet, grazing. Rusty turned from the cattle to the men. Briefly he recounted the conversation that had just taken place back by the wagon. When he had finished, Kansas asked a question.

"Yo're goin' through."

"I got to," Rusty said simply.

"How?"

Rusty pushed back his hat. "It must be open range that Farrel an' his bunch are usin'," he answered. "We'll move west. Then along about dark, we'll start the steers. They'll run, an' before they stop they'll be through the line, an' there won't be any quarantine left. We'll gather 'em an' go to Dodge. I don't want to start from here because there's fences north of us, an' I don't want cattle piled up against wire an' cut to pieces. I think—" There was something in Kansas' face that made him pause.

"Don't you think that would work?" Rusty demanded. "After all, I'm not goin' to hurt their range. There aren't any ticks on these cattle."

"It would work all right," Kansas agreed. "You wouldn't do 'em no damage neither, an' I guess it would

be the right thing to do. But there's somethin' else botherin' me, an' the boys, Rusty."

"What?"

Kansas looked at his companions and then back to the trail boss. "We can't go no further with you," he said apologetically. "We . . . well, we're kind of wanted in this country. I been meanin' to tell you that we was goin' to have to quit pretty quick. Now with this business of bein' held up here an' what with fellers that'll come out visitin' the herd an' all, we think mebbe we'd better pull our freight back where we come from." He looked anxiously into Rusty's eyes.

Rusty could not help but grin. Bad as the news was, bad as was the position in which he would be left when these men were gone, still he could not help but feel the grim humor of the situation.

KANSAS, seeing the trace of a smile twitch Rusty's lips, let his own grin spread over his homely face. "It's just a matter of a few horses that was missin' up here," he confided. "It ain't nothin' serious, but you can't never tell how these grangers are goin' to take a thing. An' they know we done it, too. That feller that was talkin' to you owned some of the horses."

Rusty laughed. "I don't blame you boys a bit," he said, when his laughter was done. "You stuck out yore necks when you came this far with me, an' I'm sure obliged to you. The thing is, I'm goin' to have trouble payin' you off. I haven't any money an' no letter of credit. I don't know exactly how to handle it, an' from what you say you don't want to stick around."

"We talked about that, too," Kansas said. "We figured that mebbe you could spare us a few horses."

"Why, I can do that," Rusty agreed.

"An' we ain't just goin' to leave you up a tree," Kansas continued. "We'll hang around awhile until you can get some men to help handle the steers. It's just that we dassen't go any further. You know how it is, don't you?"

Rusty nodded. "I know," he answered. "An' like I say, I'm obliged to you boys a whole lot."

"Guess we can go back to camp now," Chico said. "Seems like they're gone."

Rusty laughed again, and with Kansas and Chico beside him, started back toward the wagon.

As he rode he considered briefly the change in his circumstances. He had had, not twenty minutes ago, a crew that would follow him and obey him, and in his mind had been a plan that would take him through the quarantine line. Now he had neither crew nor plan. He could not —as he had told them—blame Kansas and his fellows a bit for quitting. They had run a big risk coming so far with the herd. Rusty felt a thrill of pride and satisfaction because he knew that the risk had been taken on his account. But the fact remained that, because of their own safety, the men would go no farther.

And that spoiled Rusty's plan. Any man that he might employ, always providing that he could get men, would be from this locality. Their loyalty would not be to the herd or to the trail boss, but to the dollar that hired them. Men like that would not take chances. They would not stampede a herd of steers through a quarantine line, and then abide by the consequences. The

scheme that Rusty had outlined to Kansas and his fellows was out. And, if it was out, how could Rusty take the Watrous herd through to Dodge City? How could he meet the delivery date which was not more than a week away? Rusty did not know.

He was silent when he reached the wagon and, dismounting, tied his horse. He walked to his unrolled bed and, sitting down on it, built a cigarette. Over and over in his mind he turned possibilities and could find no solution to his problem. There was no way out. And now a grim struggle began in Rusty. Carlisle had a scheme. Carlisle thought that he could take the cattle through the quarantine. Maybe Carlisle could do it. Rusty's pride rebelled against the idea, against the fact that Carlisle might succeed where he, Rusty Shotridge, had failed. But there was the herd to consider, and Colonel Watrous waiting in Dodge City.

Rusty remembered how he had talked to Gil Travis, away back there below the Canadian. Rusty had reminded Travis that he had taken Colonel Watrous' wages a long time. He had been appealing to Travis' loyalty and, because of that appeal, Travis had started to join in when the trouble began. Now Gil Travis was dead. Was a man's pride any more than a man's life? Was Gil Travis a better man than Rusty Shotridge?

Rusty got up from his bed and walked over to where Carlisle sat. He stood looking down at Carlisle, and the dark-eyed youth stared up at him.

"I'm stumped, Carlisle," Rusty said levelly. "I don't know how to get through this quarantine. You said you could do it. If you can, I'll take your orders."

CHAPTER XV

RUSTY'S CHALLENGE

AT first Carlisle, looking up at Rusty, thought that this was some trick, some trap that was being set for him. Then he realized that his suspicion had no foundation. Rusty Shotridge was surrendering. He was stepping out and putting Carlisle in charge. The knowledge flooded the young man, filling him with sudden, savage satisfaction. He continued to stare at Rusty.

"So you can't get through?" he drawled. "You've found something you can't do. Well, I can do it, Shotridge, and you'll go with me while I do it."

"I've said I'd take your orders, Carlisle," Rusty answered steadily. "Have you got any?"

"Not now," Carlisle answered. "But tomorrow morning you'll go with me."

Rusty nodded and, turning, walked back to his bed. He seated himself and after a little time Carlisle could see the intermittent glowing of his cigarette.

Leonard Carlisle lay back upon his bed, locked his hands behind his head and stared at the stars. Why Rusty had surrendered Carlisle did not know. He only knew that the surrender had come and that the fact was sweet.

In the morning when the camp was wakened and the usual morning chores were done, Carlisle nodded to Rusty. "We'll go now," he said, and smiled maliciously.

Rusty made no comment. He turned to Nugget, who stood close by. "We'll hold the steers right where we are," he said briefly. "Just day-herd 'em."

Nugget nodded, and Kansas, who had just come up from saddling a

horse, looked curious. "What about —" he began.

"I'd be obliged if you boys could wait around for awhile," Rusty said, answering the unfinished question. "It's too big a job for Ben to handle alone, an' Telesfor can't help him much till I get back. Will that suit you?"

Kansas stood silent a moment before answering. "We'll stay as long as we can," he agreed. "But somethin' might come up that would make us go. We'll do the best we can for you, Rusty."

"That's all any man could ask," Rusty said.

Carlisle spoke impatiently. "Come on, Shotridge."

"Comin'," Rusty answered.

The two rode away side by side, Kansas and Nugget following their disappearing figures with questioning eyes. Two hundred yards from the wagon Carlisle spoke to his companion. "I want to find the men who came to camp yesterday: Peters and Farrel. Do you know where we can find them?"

"Farrel has a place over west," Rusty answered. "I don't know where we can locate Peters."

"You should have asked," Carlisle's voice chastised Rusty. "Well, no matter. I want to find them."

"Then the best thing to do is to strike west," Rusty said. "There'll be somebody watchin' along the

AUDELS Carpenters and Builders Guides 4 vols. $6

Inside Trade Information for Carpenters, Builders, Joiners, Building Mechanics and all Woodworkers. These Guides give you the short-cut instructions that you want—including new methods, ideas, solutions, plans, systems and money saving suggestions. An easy progressive course for the apprentice and student. A practical daily helper and Quick Reference for the master worker. Carpenters everywhere are using these Guides as a Helping Hand to Easier Work, Better Work and Better Pay. To get this assistance for yourself, simply fill in and mail the FREE COUPON below.

Inside Trade Information On:

How to use the steel square—How to file and set saws—How to build furniture—How to use a mitre box—How to use the chalk line—How to use rules and scales—How to make joints—Carpenters arithmetic—Solving mensuration problems—Estimating strength of timbers—How to set girders and sills—How to frame houses and roofs—How to estimate costs—How to build houses, barns, garages, bungalows, etc.—How to read and draw plans—Drawing up specifications—How to excavate—How to use settings 12, 13 and 17 on the steel square—How to build hoists and scaffolds—skylights—How to build stairs—How to put on interior trim—How to hang doors—How to lath—lay floors—How to paint

THEO. AUDEL & CO., 49 W. 23rd St., New York City

Mail Audels Carpenters and Builders Guides, 4 vols., on 7 days' free trial. If O.K. I will remit $1 in 7 days, and $1 monthly until $6 is paid. Otherwise I will return them. No obligation unless I am satisfied.

Name.....

Address.....

Occupation.....

Reference..... S841

BENJAMIN AIR PISTOL WITH HAND PUMP

Made in U. S. A.

For Target—Small Game—Camping—Etc. Guaranteed—Accurate—Practical—Economical—Safe—Clean—Quiet. Adjustable Force—Amazing Maximum Velocity. No Smoke or Fumes. Bolt Action—Hammer Fire—Hair Trigger—Safety Lock—Hand Pump. Single Shot BB $8.50; Single Shot cal. .177 or 22 with rifled barrel $8.50; BB 8-Shot $10.00; Holster $2.00. Also a complete line of Benjamin Genuine Compressed Air Rifles for BB and cal. .177 or .22. No license required from dealer or factory. Write Today for complete specifications and free targets.

BENJAMIN AIR RIFLE CO. 883 Marion St. St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

BE PATRIOTIC · WEAR NEW BRACELET & LOCKET

Brand new idea. Everyone should show their colors with Handsomely Gold Plated Red, White & Blue Enameled Flags. Send only 50c Coin Today.

R. M. SMITH,
P. O. Box 491
Church St. Ax., N. Y. C.

BOTH ONLY 50¢ POST PAID

ACCOUNTING
the profession that pays

Accountants command good income. Thousands needed. About 20,000 Certified Public Accountants in U. S. Many earn $2,000 to $10,000. We train you thoroughly at home in your spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous bookkeeping knowledge unnecessary—we prepare you from ground up. Our training is personally given by staff of experienced C. P. A.'s. Low cost—easy terms. Write now for valuable 48-page book free, "Accounting, the Profession That Pays."

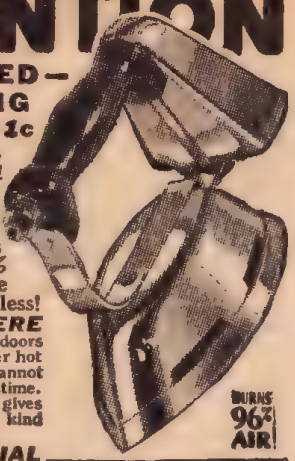
LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION Dept. 165-H Chicago

NEW IRONING INVENTION

STREAMLINED—SELF-HEATING

Irons in ½ Time for 1c

Newest ironing discovery in 20 years! Beautiful, streamlined, all chromium-plated iron has no cords or tubes, heats itself, burns 96% free air and only 4% kerosene. Does whole ironing for a penny or less!



USE IT ANYWHERE

Can be used anywhere, indoors or out. No more work over hot stove! Insulated handle. Cannot rust or tarnish. Lasts a lifetime. Finger-touch heat control gives right temperature for any kind of ironing.

30-DAY HOME TRIAL

Try it for 30 days at our risk. Satisfaction is guaranteed. Write at once for full particulars and how to get yours FREE, by helping to introduce it.

AGENTS! Selling everywhere! Wynne made $16 in one day, Jamison $15. Write at once for sensational profit plan.

AKRON LAMP & MFG. CO., 1003 IRON Bldg., Akron, Ohio

Read **"PIC"**

Covering the entire field of entertainment

theater . . . .

movies . . . .

sports . . . .

with more brilliant pictorial, exciting features than are found in any other picture magazine. Comes out every other Friday—10c a copy.

"PIC"

Published by Street & Smith

creek, an' we can find out about Farrel from him."

Not a mile from the wagon Rusty's prophesy was fulfilled. As they crossed the little stream that Farrel had called Kaw Creek, a man came riding down toward them from a knoll. He carried a rifle across his arm and his gray beard was stained with tobacco juice.

"Goin' some place?" he asked casually.

"We're looking for Mr. Farrel," Carlisle answered.

The guard thought for a moment, studying the two cowmen as he rolled his tobacco back and forth in his mouth. Then he nodded.

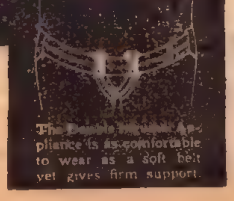
"No harm in that, I guess," he drawled. "Farrel's place is about eight miles west an' north of here. You can't miss it. Jest foller the creek."

Carlisle turned his horse and started on, and Rusty, smiling at the guard, drawled: "Thanks."

AS the two rode along the creek, heavy grass lay all about them, rustling against their stirrups as they rode. This was a paradise for cattle, this flat, plains country. The creek grew smaller and finally became a series of potholes, the grass growing so heavy that it overhung the water.

"I don't see—" Carlisle began petulantly.

"It's over there," Rusty said, pointing. Following the direction of his arm, Carlisle could see a clump



Send a Postcard for FREE Book on Rupture

STOP YOUR Rupture Worries!

See This Perfected Rupture Invention

Why worry and suffer any longer? Learn about our perfected invention for all forms of reducible rupture in men, women and children. Support fitted with automatic air cushion assists Nature in a natural strengthening of the weakened muscles. Thousands made happy. Weighs but a few ounces, is inconspicuous and sanitary. No stiff springs or hard pads. No salves or plasters. Durable, cheap. **SENT ON TRIAL** to prove it. Beware of imitations. Never sold in stores or by agents. Write today for full information and Free Book on Rupture. All correspondence confidential.

BROOKS APPLIANCE COMPANY, 408-G State Street, Marshall, Mich.

of trees. There were horses in the trees and close by the timber a little mound.

"Soddy," Rusty explained. "Likely Farrel lives in it. There's a sod barn behind the house."

Carlisle could see another, bigger knoll now as they turned to ride toward the timber.

Details presented themselves as the two approached. The horses in the timber were saddled and tied. There were a dozen of them. A tin chimney stuck through the roof of the sod house; a corral, hidden because of the trees, showed behind the length of the sod barn. Men loafed in the shade of the barn, and as Carlisle and Rusty came up, Farrel himself climbed the steps from the soddy and stood there, waiting. Carlisle stopped and dismounted, and Rusty, swinging down, took the reins of both horses and held them while Carlisle advanced.

"I've come over to talk to you, Mr. Farrel," Carlisle said.

The cowman made a gesture toward the door of the sod house. "Come in," he invited. "We're havin' a sort of committee meetin'. Come in."

Carlisle, at the top step, looked back at his companion. "Tie the horses and come on," he ordered curtly.

Rusty tied his own reins to the horn of Carlisle's saddle. Carlisle's reins to the horn of his own. Head to tail the horses stood, swishing at flies in the early-morning sunlight. The horses fastened, Rusty followed Carlisle down the steps.

There was light from the door and from a glazed window in the sod house. Not much light, for the window was dirty and the door gave only enough space for sunlight to form an oblong pool upon the earthen floor. Carlisle was sitting on a bench close to the door, and opposite him, along the wall and beside a table, men sat, grave-faced

FOR those of you who like horses, who like to find out odd and interesting things about them—here's a new department. AROUND THE DOUBLE R CORRAL with Dick Clarke is just about the greatest feature ROMANTIC RANGE has ever had.

Dick tells you about different breeds of horses—the background of their history—and in doing so, he brings you back to days of romance and glamour. And he answers your questions about horses, and about people connected with them . . . in other words, here's everything you want to know about the Westerner's best friend!

And of course, for tops in clean, wholesome stories about the great outdoors—love against the background of the rolling prairies—there's nothing to beat

ROMANTIC RANGE

FEBRUARY

10c A COPY AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

and silent, as though met in judgment. There were six of them.

Rusty paused beside Carlisle, leaning his back against the wall and standing utterly relaxed. Carlisle had waited for Rusty to come before he began. He wanted Rusty to see his triumph, wanted him to witness his success in the task that Rusty had assumed and relinguished.

"I've come over to see you this mornin," Carlisle announced, some condescension in his tone. "I wanted to get together with you about this quarantine."

No one answered for a moment. Rusty could see Joel Peters shifting uneasily. The others sat still as stones. When answer came, it was Farrel who made it.

"Yes?"

Carlisle nodded. "I've got a delivery date to make in Dodge City," he announced. "I've got my cattle sold and I've got to get them there."

Rusty could see the tightening in the still faces that confronted him. Carlisle was not getting very far, Rusty thought.

"There's no sense in this quarantine," Carlisle continued. "We can get together about it."

"*We* already got together." A gray-haired, gray-bearded man close beside Farrel spoke. "We made a quarantine line an' it ain't goin' to be broke."

Carlisle looked at the speaker, and then turned again to Farrel. "We aren't going to try to break it," he said.

Relief came into the room, definitely, entering almost as a man might come down the steps. "But I'm going to get my cattle to Dodge City," Carlisle continued.

The relief was gone, as definitely as it had come.

Farrel shook his head. "You can't," he said bluntly.

"Yes, I can," Carlisle said confidently. "Trail cattle mean too much to Kansas for you men to hold us out. The merchants in Dodge City and the cattle buyers won't let you keep up this farce."

QUIET followed that announcement, and into the silence Farrel threw words. "The Dodge City people ain't got fences to be cut, or cattle that can get tick fever. It ain't them that's set a quarantine. It's us."

Along the wall men nodded their heads. Carlisle spoke quickly. "That's why I came to see you. I thought—"

"Arguin' won't get you any place," Farrel interrupted. "We made a bargain with each other, an' we're goin' to keep it. You can't get through."

"But wait until you hear what I've got to say," Carlisle protested. "I want to do the fair thing for you. Now I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll buy a passage through your quarantine for my cattle. How is that?"

Here was Carlisle's idea. Here was the thing that he had thought of, the plan that would show his su-

periority over Rusty Shotridge, the scheme that would get the herd through to Dodge City. In that little room, with dirt walls all about, it fell flat.

"What'll you buy it with?" Farrel asked after a moment. "How you goin' to pay for spreadin' ticks on our range? Or how you goin' to pay for wheat that's tramped out? You ain't got enough money."

"But I'll pay—" Carlisle began.

"You might buy one wheat field," Farrel interrupted, "but you couldn't buy 'em all. There's more behind the first one. An' you can't buy passage through my country. My son-in-law—"

"He was my boy," Peters cut in heavily. "You damned wild Texas cowmen killed him."

"But—" Carlisle began.

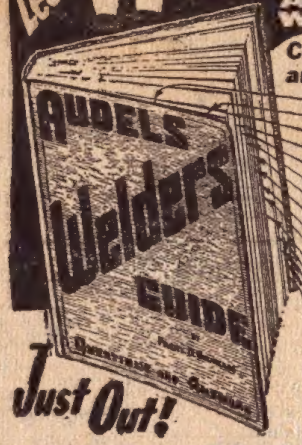
"You can't do it," Farrel said flatly. "There ain't enough money to buy a lane through this country."

Dead silence followed that announcement. In the quiet came a little creaking sound as Rusty Shotridge shifted his weight against the door. For a moment more the tension held and then Rusty asked calmly: "Yo're the men that set up the quarantine, aren't you? Yo're the bosses?"

All eyes left Carlisle's face and settled on Rusty's. Farrel nodded very

Learn WELDING This Easy Way!

AUDELS NEW WELDERS GUIDE



Contains Important Facts and Essential Information!

WELDING METHODS
WELDERS
ELECTRIC
OXY-ACETYLENE
THERMIT
UNIONMELT
SHEET METAL
SPOT
PIPE
PRESSURE VESSELS
VARIOUS METALS
AIRPLANE
HARDENING-FACING
CUTTING
EYE PROTECTION

Just Out!

$1

Every Welder Should Own This New, Useful Book containing clear, concise, practical information, pointers and facts relating to modern practice in all Branches. Easy to read and understand—over 400 pages Fully Illustrated—flexible cover—pocket size—a Ready Reference that Answers Your Questions accurately—Money Back if not O.K. To get this assistance for yourself, order copy today.

THEO. AUDEL, Publishers, 49 W. 23rd St., New York

Please mail AUDELS WELDERS GUIDE (Price $1). If satisfactory, I will remit $1 on its safe arrival, otherwise I will return the book.

Name_____

Address_____

Occupation_____

Employed by_____ S841

MAGIC DISC

HEATS WATER IN 60 SECONDS

Any 110-Volt Line

Millions need Speed King—gives you hot water fast and cheap. Drop into any pan of water—plug into socket—in 60 seconds you have hot water. Rush your name for sample offer for use or demonstrator. Plenty cash profits for agents. No money. Just send name. Postcard will do.

Pocket Size SAMPLES FOR AGENTS. SEND NAME!

NU-WAY MFG. CO., DES MOINES, IOWA Dept. 361, Walnut Bldg.

Train for a beginning position in 8 to 10 months—detailer's position ($130-$225 a month) in 14 to 18 months.

Draftsmen Needed in All Lines

Architectural • Automotive • Aviation
Diesel • Electrical • Structural • Mechanical

The Draftsman is the connecting link between the Mechanic and Engineer—earns exceptionally good pay—enjoys wonderful opportunities for promotion. Steady work because *everything* built or made starts with drawings.

Employment Service FREE to Students

Learn quickly at home in spare time. No experience or artistic talent needed. School established 1897. Low tuition. Monthly payments. Write TODAY for FREE Bulletin and facts about *Selective Employment Service*. No obligation. *Address*

American School, Dept. DD-17
Drexel Ave. at 58th St., Chicago, Ill.

COURSES APPROVED BY NATIONAL HOME STUDY COUNCIL WASHINGTON, D.C.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Photo Finishing—Developing

FREE—ONE ROLL DEVELOPED AND PRINTED FREE. Just to get acquainted, we will beautifully develop and print your first 6 to 16 exposure roll Free plus 5x7 inch enlargement Free, also sensational, new folding folio to frame your prints, all free with this ad. (Enclosing 10c for handling and mailing appreciated.) Dean Studios, Dept. 1024, Des Moines, Iowa.

ROLLS DEVELOPED—25c coin. Two 5x7 Double Weight Professional Enlargements, 8 Gloss Deckle Edge Prints. Club Photo Service, Dept. 17, LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

8 ENLARGEMENTS and films developed, 116 size or smaller, 25c coin. Special Introductory Offer: Enclose this ad and negative with your order for double weight hand colored Enlargements Free. Enlarge Photo, Box 791, Dept. SS, Boston, Mass.

DOUBLE SIZE PRINTS. Roll developed, 8 prints all enlarged to nearly postcard size, 25c. Willard Studios, Dept. 9, Cleveland, O.

Patents Secured

INVENTORS—Don't delay. Protect your idea with a Patent. Secure "Patent Guide" and "Record of Invention" form—Free. Preliminary information furnished without obligation. Write Clarence A. O'Brien, Registered Patent Attorney, 1B51 Adams Building, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—PATENT YOUR INVENTION. Secure booklet "How to Protect Your Invention." No obligation. McMorrow and Berman, Registered Patent Attorneys, 151-A Barrister Building, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Reasonable terms. Book and advice free. L. F. Randolph, Dept. 513, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS SECURED. Two valuable booklets sent free. Write immediately. Victor J. Evans & Company, 424-B Victor Building, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS: HAVE YOU a sound, practical invention for sale, patented or unpatented? If so, write Chartered Institute of American Inventors, Dept. 42, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—Delays are dangerous—Secure patent protection now. Get new Free copyrighted booklet, "How To Protect Your Invention." No charge for preliminary information. McMorrow and Berman, Registered Patent Attorneys, 151-B Barrister Building, Washington, D. C.

Detectives—Instructions

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. WORK HOME. TRAVEL. DETECTIVE particulars free. Experience unnecessary. Write GEORGE WAGONER, 2640-A Broadway, New York.

Coins—Old Money

GET PROFIT and PLEASURE in collecting old coins. Send 10c for 56-page illustrated coin catalog. You'll be delighted with it. Send for it now. B. Max Mehl, 255 Mehl Building, Fort Worth, Texas. Largest rare coin establishment in U. S. Established 41 years.

Correspondence Courses

CORRESPONDENCE courses and educational books, slightly used. Sold. Rented. Exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Complete details and bargain Catalog Free. Write Nelson Company, 500 Sherman, Dept. B-215, Chicago.

Baby Chicks

COLONIAL CHICKS low as $5.40 per 100. Time Payments. World's largest hatcheries. Leading breeds. Also Sexed and Hybrids. Big Chick Almanac Free. Colonial Poultry Farms, Pleasant Hill, Mo.

Help Wanted—Instructions

SPECIAL WORK FOR MARRIED WOMEN. Earn to $23 weekly and your own dresses Free. No canvassing, no investment. Write fully giving age, dress size. Fashion Frocks, Dept. BB-1023, Cincinnati, O.

YOUR OWN DRESSES FREE and up to $22 a week selling famous Harford Frocks. Hundreds sensational bargains. Send dress size, age. Harford, Dept. S-246, Cincinnati, O.

Nurses Training Schools

MAKE UP TO $25-$35 WEEK AS A TRAINED Practical Nurse! Learn quickly at home. Booklet Free. Chicago School of Nursing, Dept. D-1, Chicago.

Poems—Songwriters

SONGWRITERS! Send for New Special Offer. Jas. S. Crane, Box 154, Providence, Rhode Island.

Old Gold Wanted

GOLD—$35 OUNCE. Ship old gold teeth, crowns, jewelry, watches—receive cash by return mail. Satisfaction Guaranteed. Free information. Paramount Gold Refining Co., 1500-G Hennepin, Minneapolis, Minn.

Old Money Wanted

OLD MONEY WANTED. Do you know that Coin Collectors pay up to $100.00 for certain U. S. Cents? And high premiums for all rare coins? I buy all kinds. Send 4c for Large Coin Folder. May mean much profit to you. B. Max Mehl, 440 Mehl Bldg., Fort Worth, Texas.

slowly. Rusty's voice drawled on, casually, a commonplace voice, and yet carrying a depth and force that prevented interruption.

"We're goin' to take the cattle through. We got to."

In the dim corner of the room a man moved. Rusty shifted again, just a fraction, his left shoulder against the door casing, right arm and hand hanging free.

"Wait!" he ordered. The man in the corner checked his movement and Rusty's voice went on. "Let me talk a minute."

"Talk then!" Farrel said curtly. "But if you think—"

"A man's got a kind of pride," Rusty drawled, as Farrel paused. "You've got pride an' I've got it. I've come from Texas with these cattle. I've got to get 'em to Dodge City. We've had a tough time on the trail. We've had some steers stolen, an' we've lost some men. The trail boss that started with the herd was killed in a stampede. I saw a man that would have made a friend, killed, an' I killed the man that shot him. We've had a tough time, but we've come so far. Now we're goin' on."

He paused a moment, glancing around the room, demanding the attention of his listeners with his eyes. "You've set up this quarantine, an' it's yore pride to hold it," he said softly. "I've brought this herd so far an' it's my pride to take it on. This is a showdown. You can do one of two things: Either you can let my herd through or you can take to shootin'!"

Will Rusty be able to come to an agreement with the embittered cowmen and farmers who block him or will he fail in his self-assumed job? Has he seen the last of Honey Yates and Slippery Smith? Will the Watrous herd reach Dodge City? Another smashing installment of TRAIL OF THE THUNDERING HERDS follows in next week's issue.